

**RIGHT MODERN
TECHNOLOGY, NATION, AND BRITAIN'S EXTREME RIGHT IN THE INTERWAR
PERIOD
(1919 – 1940)**

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Presented to
The Academic Faculty

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my father Glenn R. Zander who made my pursuit of such a dream possible, to my wife Pamela whom I love dearly and who has always supported my efforts despite the demands of graduate work, to my son Bennett who is the light of my life, and finally to my mother, Gayle L. Zander who tragically passed away during the writing of this dissertation and who helped make my new academic life possible – giving me life for a second time.

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SUMMARY

This study examines the extreme right wing political tendency in Great Britain during the interwar years and particularly its relationship to technological modernity. The far right has been much misunderstood and under-researched, often seen as part of “Appeasement Conservatism” and as a group of out-dated elites inhibiting Britain’s modernization. In fact, this study suggests, the extreme right was distinct from Tory Conservatism and promoted its own (exclusionary and objectionable) paradigm of modernism. In its policies, rhetoric, and practices, the far right, above all, advocated a technically modernized Britain. Only such a modernized state, they believed, (in terms of industrial and military strength), could take its place in the new generation of Great Powers in a predatory and chaotic world. Extreme right leaders were convinced that Britain must insulate itself from such economic and political chaos by preserving its Empire, creating an autarkic economy, eliminating “foreign elements” at home, and by creating a lethal modern defense. For Britain to accomplish these objectives, it would have to master and apply modern science and technology on a national scale. For Britain to maintain (or re-assert) its former world leadership, said the far right, it had to become a “Great Technological Nation.”

Members of Britain’s extreme right were especially influenced by the fascist dictatorships – their crushing of Marxism, their supposed elimination of class war, and especially their apparent accomplishments of modernization. A disproportionate number of British fascists and fascist supporters were key members of Britain’s industrial and high-tech. elite. As they praised the dictatorships and attacked Britain’s liberal-democratic system, they used issues of national modernization (aviation, modern highways, radio communications, military mechanization) as a key battlefield for political debate. In such debates they routinely positioned their own tendency

as the best hope for progress against the supposed irrationality of the left and the alleged ineptitude of professional politicians created by democracy.

These campaigns did not produce any meaningful victories in electoral politics. Most of the politicians who sympathized with such views changed their public affiliations by the coming of WWII or were discredited. Nor did any explicitly fascist party in Britain ever win a seat in Parliament. Most studies, then, have focused upon the failure of British fascism or those societal and economic conditions which prevented authoritarianism from gaining purchase. This study, however, intersects with some of the most crucial questions of modern British history and forces a re-appraisal of the “failure” of the far right. Explaining economic and industrial decline has long been the central question for historians of 20th Century Britain. A new interpretation, however, has recently been put forward by historian David Edgerton. He sees 20th Century Britain as dominated by its state sponsored military-industrial complex and as one of the most technologically modern nations in the world. Industrial Decline simply didn’t happen, according to Edgerton. Far from a “Welfare State,” mired in industrial decline, Britain forged ahead in the production of lethal defense technologies, engineered by a culture of technical experts. The declinist argument used by so many historians to explain Britain’s postwar experience, took shape, in its broadest outlines, within the collective discourse of Britain’s interwar extreme right. The far right deployed this declinist argument, in its most intensive form, in order to discredit existing institutions, to convince the public of an apocalyptic disaster if change were not made, and to support their own particular vision of high modernism.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Foreword

In 1980 Richard Griffiths published Fellow Travelers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-1939. It remains the most complete survey of Britain's extreme right wing and its relationship to fascism during the interwar years. Among the prominent Nazi sympathizers Griffiths profiled was Lord Londonderry, coal magnate, and one of Britain's wealthiest aristocrats. Londonderry was from an ancient and noble family and fought hard to protect the accumulated property and power of his class. He believed his aristocratic pedigree endowed him with innate talents and responsibilities and so he pressed for positions in public service. In Ramsay MacDonald's National Government he was appointed Secretary of State for Air, but was forced out of office in 1935, stained with the indignity of falling behind German air production. Out of politics he searched desperately for some way to remain engaged and relevant. Informal diplomacy with Nazi Germany during the tense years of the late 1930's provided an avenue for him to re-insert himself into the drama of politics.

During those years Londonderry made multiple visits to Germany and met with some of its most important leaders. These included hunting trips with Hermann Goering and even a meeting with Hitler, himself. In 1937 he published a small book, Ourselves and Germany, a plea for British understanding and a call for an Anglo-German alliance. Londonderry, however, was not a literal fascist, and apparently had no wish for a British fascist dictatorship. But, he did praise and support fascist dictatorships on the continent. He was convinced they were a necessary barrier against Bolshevism, and so threw himself into efforts to secure a negotiated alliance between Britain and Nazi Germany.

The old world aristocrat playing at diplomacy would seem to be a prime example of the arrogance of outdated men interfering in an arena that demanded modern, bureaucratic professionals. Secure in their privilege, it would seem, men and women like Londonderry had no idea that the world had passed them by, and in their efforts to keep modernity or revolution at bay, ended up associating themselves with the evils of Fascism and Nazism. In Griffiths' book he includes a remarkable photograph of Londonderry at leisure with Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in the gardens of Londonderry's estate. Sporting tweed jackets, handkerchiefs, and plus-fours they descend the stone garden stairway with three statues rising behind them. Perched atop the stone pediments are sculptures of the famously extinct dodo birds from Africa. The caption to the photograph reads, "MacDonald and Londonderry among the dodos." It is a powerful image with a clear message about those peering out from it— the time, for both birds and men, had come and gone. They were relics of another age.

More recently, in 2004, Sir Ian Kershaw has written a new biography of Lord Londonderry, Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis, and the Road to War. In tracing Londonderry's life and career, Kershaw does not overturn the image of the man as an old world aristocrat or as someone who was misguided in his dealings with the Nazis. But, Kershaw does reveal (though perhaps under-emphasizes) a side of Londonderry that has been somewhat overlooked. As Air Minister, Londonderry headed the most modern of government departments. In charge of developing and deploying radical new technologies, Londonderry in fact launched some of the most cutting edge projects of the age. Despite some genuine performance issues and mismanagement in his Ministry, Kershaw asserts:

His period in office had not been devoid of achievements – though few were prepared to acknowledge them at the time, when he was widely seen as a failure, or even in years to come, when he had been stigmatized as pro-German. Londonderry did set in train the design and promotion of what would turn into the Hurricanes and Spitfires that were to

play such vital part in the Battle of Britain. The beginnings of British radar development – and little could have been more important in the air war soon to come – also date back to his period in office. It was under Londonderry as Air Minister, too, that the early British bombers (whose prototypes were revealed in 1936) – the Wellingtons, Hampdens and Blenheims – originated.¹

Londonderry had been a vital proponent of the new technologies and extended air routes that helped push the nation into the modern age, and which would later prove crucial to Britain's survival.

Kershaw provides another photograph of Londonderry, this time leaning out of his service plane's cockpit, his goggles perched on his aviator's cap, saying his goodbyes before taking to the air; a picture of rather glamorous 30's modernity. Kershaw includes another photo of Londonderry announcing the new international air mail route at Croyden aerodrome, standing in front of the massive new plane that would carry the post all the way to Australia; a remarkable step forward. So, as one looks at Londonderry and MacDonald "among the dodos"— seemingly the very image of obsolescence— one must keep in mind that it does not tell the whole story. The dodo was, after all, a *flightless* bird.

This is no attempt to resuscitate Londonderry's reputation; his relationship with prominent Nazis speaks for itself. But, what is so striking is Londonderry's embodiment of that contradiction, so often encountered in studies of interwar fascism, between the modern and the reactionary. His unofficial aristocrat's diplomacy and support of fascism may have undermined a more unified diplomatic challenge to the Nazis. But, his embrace of modern progress, as Air Minister, eventually helped produce some of the technologies that would *save* Britain from

¹ Sir Ian Kershaw, Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis, and the Road to War. (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 113.

fascism, and see the nation through its finest hour. Were Britain's pro-fascists, like Londonderry, outdated relics promoting a return to Britain's past, or were they primarily concerned with launching Britain into the modern age?



Lord Londonderry announcing the new Australian air mail routes at Croyden Aerodrome. It would be the longest air route in the world.

Introduction

In the turmoil of Britain's interwar years, the Conservative Party expanded its power and governed Britain for the vast majority of the 1920's and 30's. It was challenged by a maturing, socialist-inspired Labour Party which had all but replaced the Liberal Party as the party of reform. Appalled by this progress of the left, and the unimaginative policies of Tory Conservatism, those on the extreme right abandoned Conservative politics and formed their own distinct political tendency. This extreme right wing, and its place in the interwar political struggle, has at times been misrepresented by scholars. The far right is often confused with or lumped under the Appeasement policies of Neville Chamberlain's Conservatives, but this is a mistake. While the extreme right did enthusiastically support good relations with the dictatorships, they also believed that Britain should emulate them in terms of political authority and armed strength. Also, the extreme right is often thought of as having been unambiguously reactionary. Some see the extreme right as having presented a stubborn, sometimes violent, obstacle to Britain's modernity, which was being driven by the more progressive left.² This work will suggest modifications to that picture by asserting that Britain's extreme right was in fact quite modernist in its rhetoric and agenda. Rather than attempting to suppress "progress," this group put forward its own (grossly exclusionary and misguided) alternative vision of modernity. In action and in print, the extreme right tried to position itself as Britain's best hope for bringing the nation's politics up-to-date to meet an unsettling set of modern challenges.

² These range from contemporary interpretations from writers like John Strachey in his Menace of Fascism. (New York: Covici & Friede, 1933) and Robert A. Brady's The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism. (New York: Viking, 1934) to more recent historians like John R. Harrison's The Reactionaries: A Study in the Anti-Democratic Intelligentsia. (New York: Schocken, 1967), Richard Griffiths' Fellow Travelers of the Right and Dan Stone's Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) and Responses to Nazism 1933-1939. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Central to this agenda, the far right passionately asserted that Britain had to become (or re-establish itself as) a “great technological nation.” Rising economic competition and the disaster of the Great War had diminished the world position of the British Empire, despite its victory. In the wake of that cataclysm, said the far right, there existed a new, more predatory world where only the strongest, most rationalized states would emerge as the new generation of Great Powers. Of these, the Soviet Union loomed as the greatest menace, with its potentially violent threat to private enterprise, and its own remarkably rapid modernization.

The Ultra-right wing also believed that technology figured crucially in this emerging new order. Scientific and Industrial advance had presented a new set of realities that governments were now forced to manage. Those governments who failed to understand and master these new conditions were destined for subjugation or obliteration. To Britain’s extreme right, then, technological strength was the source of national independence and imperial integrity. They came to believe that economic self-sufficiency backed up by powerful armaments—each achieved by applying modern science and technology on a national scale— provided the best opportunity to preserve Britain’s status and independence in a chaotic world.

What is Modernity?

If we are setting out on a journey to uncover the “modern” aspects of Britain’s extreme right, and even to assert that this was its predominant impulse, we must be sure of what we mean by the term. While there is no definitive single consensus, scholars have assembled a reasonably consistent collective conception of modernity. A good deal of that definition includes identifying what modernity is not – what it rejects or changes. Thus, our best understanding of modernity might come from examining the shifts away from traditional elements toward those of the modern world. First, the process of modernization would surely include the move away from

traditional agriculture and toward mechanized industrial production. That industry is, in turn, characterized by ever increasing division of function, standardization, and interchangeability. These all contribute to ever increasing levels of efficiency – the ability to manufacture, process, and distribute higher volumes with decreasing levels of labor and cost.

Modernization has also included, over the centuries, the shift away from social hierarchies based upon privilege, and toward an equality of individuals. In other words, moving toward a society where each individual has identical rights and opportunities under a single code of law. Along similar lines, modernization has also seen the shift away from traditionally imposed gender roles where women were involved entirely in domestic work, toward a society where women are increasingly involved in economic, political, and cultural activities.

In terms of the state, modernization includes the shift away from accumulated patchworks of regional authority and toward the centralized authority of the nation-state. Also, any definition of political modernization would include the shift away from the religious and toward the secular. This includes the shifting beliefs of ordinary people, but also includes the redistribution of political power out of the hands of religious organizations and into the hands of the secular state. The rationalization of states, then, facilitates its own kinds of efficiencies with standardized languages, laws, and bureaucracies. This helps create ever larger entities which are easier to monitor, manage and tax; a form of political “economies of scale.” (Today the “nation-state” remains the dominant formula for political organization, though developments like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and especially the European Union, hint at the possibility of “continent-states” in the future). So, modernization is especially concerned with increasing rationalization to create greater efficiencies for production, consumption, profit, and political control. There is here, however, a fundamental disconnection. The ideas associated

with “Enlightenment rationality” were primarily concerned with the use of reason or rationalization to liberate individuals from their prejudices and their servitude. In other words, the Enlightenment project and its successors have been mostly about freeing and thereby empowering the individual. By eliminating the arbitrary power of the Church, by eliminating the abomination of slavery, by eliminating noble privileges, the rationalization of states meant that individuals enjoyed increasing levels of both liberty and prosperity. But, of course, modernization also facilitates the empowerment of the state. Governments, in an effort to make their states more legible, orderly, and accountable, can use these principles of modernization to *limit* the power of individuals. Here, perhaps, we can identify a cleft in the trajectory of modernization. Modernization can take more than one form, and thus does not universally indicate greater freedom for the individual; “modern” does not necessarily mean “good” or “improved” from the individual’s point of view.

At this point, it may be useful to examine the work of James C. Scott and his conception of “authoritarian high modernism.” Scott published his book Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed, in 1998. It examines a selection of modernizing authoritarian programs, which tried to re-order their states through variations of the techniques we have just outlined. Their belief that social engineering could eliminate inefficiencies, however, produced a variety of un-foreseen results. Each of the programs he studied produced disastrous conditions for the general population – unoccupied cities, intensified poverty, and social unrest.

At the heart of Scott’s notion of authoritarian high modernism lies a tremendous faith in the power of rationalization, science, and technology to improve the lives of those upon which they are imposed. He defines authoritarian high modernism as follows:

It is best conceived as a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws. It originated in the West, as a by-product of unprecedented progress in science and industry. ... The carriers of high modernism tended to see rational order in remarkably visual aesthetic terms. For them, an efficient, rationally organized city, village, or farm was a city that looked regimented and orderly in a geometrical sense... Its carriers, even when they were capitalist entrepreneurs, required state action to realize their plans. In most cases, they were powerful officials and heads of state. They tended to prefer certain forms of planning and social organization (such as huge dams, centralized communication and transportation hubs, large factories and farms, and grid cities) because these forms fit snugly into a high-modernist view and also answered their political interests as state officials.³

While Scott explored mostly socialist cases of authoritarian high-modernist projects, the formula he identifies (high modernism coupled with state force) is quite appropriate for analyzing fascist regimes as well. But, while Scott's conception is very useful, it can also be constraining. His conception helps us to move beyond associating modernity exclusively with increasing freedoms. But, it also inhibits our understanding of the many particular varieties of high modernism, by grouping all authoritarian cases into one categorical box. Britain's extreme right shared much in common with "authoritarian high modernism," but certainly produced its own particular variant. As we explore the fears, ambitions, and rhetoric of Britain's extreme right community, we shall see a distinctive brand of high modernism, concerned with ideas of racial purity, imperial domination, economic self-sufficiency, and military high technology. They believed that using modern science and technology to order the state according to their particular vision, would create the freedom and prosperity that Enlightenment rationality had promised...but, as they saw it, failed to deliver.

Who were Britain's Extreme Right? A Brief Taxonomy

³ James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 4-5.

What political formula could best bring about this technology-based industrial/ military strength, while preserving private enterprise? Britain's extreme right figures believed that the fascist powers on the continent had found the answer. Mussolini's Italy, and later, Hitler's Germany and Franco's Spain, seemed to them to provide helpful examples for British politics. They believed the fascist dictators had defeated Marxism, solved the problems of the class war, renewed national pride, and streamlined government to respond decisively to any modern challenge. Britain's extreme right, then, admired and supported the dictatorships, and fascist-inspired strategies shaped their political vision.

In the 1920's Britain's own political situation took on radical new dimensions. After a brief boom, the economy lurched into "the slump" and rampant unemployment remained acute right up to 1939. After the demise of David Lloyd-George's Coalition Government in 1923, the Liberal party would never again emerge as a serious contender for office. Meanwhile, the socialist Labour Party, grew steadily as ordinary Britons looked for greater social justice and answers to the worsening slump. The election of two Labour Governments (1924 and 1929), the hunger marches, the prolonged coal crisis, and the General Strike of 1926, all combined to create the feeling among the right wing that the political nation, as they had known it, was under siege. In Italy, however, many on the right saw a nation moving in the other direction –away from chaos and toward stability. Mussolini's forcible elimination of left wing opposition, his ultra-nationalism, and his ability to project Italy as rationalized state, convinced many Britons that he was the very embodiment of a modern statesman.

Supporters of Fascist Italy

We must be careful in associating admirers of Mussolini directly with the extreme right. At one time or another, people from nearly all walks of Britain's political life expressed admiration

for the Duce. Even Winston Churchill had personally expressed his respect for Mussolini and his projects. But, there were those who saw in Fascism some features that could help Britain solve its problems. They established organizations and press outlets to forge closer ties with Italy and to point out Fascist methods that they felt Britain should adopt. These included Harold Elsdale Goad, Director of the British Institute of Florence. In the 1920's, Goad began to operate a regular newspaper, *The Italian Mail*, which became a voice for British pro-Fascism both in Italy and at home. Goad would attract a number of followers and by the 1930's created a study group, the London Group for the Study of the Corporate State, for evaluating how Fascist corporatism could be implemented in Britain.

Another of Mussolini's most fervent supporters in Britain was Lady Houston who owned and directed the *Saturday Review*. This emerged as one of the principle extreme right press outlets and even at times allowed Mussolini and his officials space to publish their propaganda in Britain. Lady Houston made it quite clear in its pages that she believed Mussolini was the most magnificent statesman of the modern age. Writers from all areas of the extreme right expressed their pro-Italian opinions in the *Saturday Review*. Famously, she even named her little dog "Benito." Finally, there were also Italian-employed publicists and Italian-sponsored publications, run mostly through the Italian embassy, to promote Fascist Italy in Britain. These were part of a coordinated effort on the part of Mussolini to gain credibility and create stronger ties with Britain. These publications, like the *British-Italian Bulletin*, however, were very marginal indeed and would not seem to have made any serious impact.

British Fascist Organizations

Support for Mussolini was virtually universal among the extreme right organizations and press. But, Italian Fascism found its deepest support in the explicitly British fascist

organizations. The first of these organizations to emerge was the *British Fascisti (BF)*, later the British Fascists, founded by Miss Rotha Lintern-Orman in 1923. Her organization offered fanatical support of Mussolini and borrowed the trappings of Italian Fascism, like uniforms, insignia, and marches. As we shall see, this organization lacked a distinct or coherent program beyond devotion to King and Empire and rabid anti-Communism. Neither did it participate meaningfully in electoral politics. Despite this, during the 1920's it was Britain's largest fascist organization. During the General Strike, the party divided into factions, with one group anxious to participate in government supply operations. Miss Lintern-Orman herself rejected this involvement and so split the organization. By the late 1920's, because of its lack of an action-oriented agenda, the group had lost most of its membership.

Many who left the British Fascists defected to the Imperial Fascist League (IFL). Its founder, Arnold Leese, had left the BF in disgust and created his own more radical organization. Leese was wildly anti-Jewish and the core principle of his IFL was its anti-Semitism. In that sense, the IFL also belongs under the category which follows ("Racial Purity Groups"), but Leese's party did attempt to assemble a fascist political program, including its own version of corporatism. He intended to enter electoral politics when the party gained enough support.

The IFL, however, never gained any such critical mass and was almost totally eclipsed in 1932 when political firebrand Sir Oswald Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists. Mosley, after sensationally resigning from the 1929 Labour Government and then from the Labour Party altogether, formed his own political party. This was the New Party. The New Party's program, as we shall see in the following sections, consisted mostly of the Keynesian policies of the Mosley Manifesto such as public works, and deficit spending and borrowing. The New Party was certainly not outwardly fascist, and most of the few MP's who joined were well-

meaning progressives. But, the New Party also called for things like economic self-sufficiency, an industrially based parliament, and a much streamlined executive; policies which sailed very close to the Fascist wind. The New Party contested the election of 1931 and suffered a humiliating defeat, which included Mosley losing his seat.

After touring the Empire and Italy during 1931-32, Mosley returned to Britain with a new initiative. He had clearly been inspired by his visit to Mussolini's Italy and so re-established his party in 1932 as the British Union of Fascists (BUF). He published his book The Greater Britain that same year, which served as the BUF's manifesto, and began the work of creating a large populist party. The BUF would attract around 40,000 genuine members by its peak in 1934, but would shrink afterwards. Still, the BUF, with its charismatic Leader, its modern propaganda, and its controversial public rallies, was clearly the leading British fascist party until the outbreak of World War II, when it was officially suppressed. In 1940, the British Government passed the Section 18*b* ruling, which gave the state the power to imprison those seen as security risks without trial. Mosley, his wife, a great number of BUF members, and others with open extreme right connections were jailed. They were gradually released between 1943 to 1945 as the threat of Nazi invasion receded.

Another dimension of Mosley's BUF was provided by its secret society, the January Club. Mosley understood that many of his most important supporters would be reluctant to have their names openly associated with the BUF. As such, he established a more informal and highly secret group who met privately for dinners and discussion groups. This was a very important organization for this particular study as many of the most high profile BUF sympathizers chose to use this method of support, keeping themselves out of the newspapers. Many industrialists, technical pioneers, and even celebrities were regular attendees or regular correspondents with the

January Club's Honorable Secretary, Captain H. W. Luttmann-Johnson. His letters are now open to public access in the archives of the Imperial War Museum in London and are an important source for this study.

Finally, there was the National Socialist League (NSL). This was a spin-off group begun by a few discontented members of the BUF. It was founded by the rabid anti-Semites William Joyce and John Beckett. Joyce had been involved in fascist politics since the 1920's and during the early 1930's had been a prominent East End speaker for Mosley's party. His writing in the BUF press was often so racist and incendiary that he was forced to leave. Beckett was a former Labour MP of the most radical kind, who had grown disillusioned with Labour's failure to implement its socialist programs during the 1929 Government. He is famous (or infamous) as the "man who stole the mace," once nabbing the great parliamentary symbol and dumping it in the men's washroom in protest of the Government's lack of action. He eventually joined the BUF mostly because of Mosley's policies of state intervention, but gradually developed his own seething anti-Semitism. Joyce and Beckett left the BUF during a conflict in 1937 over the direction of the party, and together established the NSL. Its rhetoric consistently attacked Mosley and the BUF as not being "Nazi enough." While stressing British national identity, this group advocated a Nazi-style fascist government in Britain and alliance with the Nazi State. While fancying itself as a politically active party, however, it never gained enough support for any meaningful activity.

Racial Purity Groups

It is clearly true that many on the extreme right were fervently anti-alienist in their sympathies. This comes out in their campaigns to keep "Britain for the British," or in their fears

of an “Alien Menace.” But, it was not generally *the* leading issue for most extreme right organizations, at least in print. The BUF, for example, adamantly asserted its non-racialism and its objections to Nazi style anti-Semitism, until 1934. After that point, the BUF turned to open anti-Semitism. Even so, this was never the BUF’s central policy; rather it was one (detestable) part of a more comprehensive political/social program. The most prominent extreme right publications like the *Daily Mail* and the *Saturday Review* generally side-stepped open racism.

But, even before the Nazis took power in 1933, there were groups in Britain whose core purpose and identity were concerned with racial hatred and national purification. These organizations never produced anything like a coordinated movement. Nor did any of them really produce a coherent political program. Their principle purpose was to alert Britons to the supposed encroachment of alien races and their potential to destroy the nation from within. And chief among the supposed “dangerous elements,” were Jews. Of this scattered array of racially based hate groups, the first established was The Britons, founded by Henry Hamilton Beamish as early as 1919. It included among its membership some of the most fanatical of the anti-Semitic community, like Victor Marsden who had translated *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Another group was The Nordic League. The Nordic League was a group with secretive initiation rites, and meetings with a mystical atmosphere. Speakers ranted about the same anti-Semitic topics amongst torch-light and imitation dolmens – like “a papier-mache Stonehenge.”⁴

We must also include here Leese’s IFL. For, although Leese did attempt to construct something like a political program, his campaign materials and his writing always returned to the “Jew Menace” as the nation’s most urgent problem. These groups spent most of their efforts

⁴ Richard Griffiths, Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British Anti-Semitism 1939-40. (London: Constable, 1998), p. 47. The Nordic League was infiltrated by agents from the *Daily Worker* who have provided a vivid picture of Nordic League meetings.

attempting to wake up the nation to their paranoid perception of a Jewish world conspiracy. Jews, they said, meant to morally and economically undermine the nations of the world for their own enrichment and did so mostly through the avenues of world finance. To make their case, these groups published and distributed works like *The Protocols*, mentioned above. This work supposedly documented Jewish aims of world domination, but is known today to be a ridiculous forgery. Other publications included Beamish's *the Jew's Who's Who* and Leese's own scurrilous treatise, *Jewish Ritual Murder*. There are also reports of a shock-film shown at the meetings titled, *Jewish Ritual Slaughter*. These groups routinely borrowed the swastika from the Nazis and incorporated it into their own sets of symbols and insignia, waving it at public demonstrations as well as their own meetings. Leese eventually made the swastika superimposed upon the Union Jack the official symbol of the IFL. Their admiration of Nazism was based primarily upon their perceived Nordic racial bond with Germans, and the Nazis' forcible tactics in eliminating Jews and other minorities.

Specifically Pro-Nazi Groups

Yet another category of extreme right organizations existed for the express purpose of nurturing Anglo-German relations and promoting Nazism. Here there is great overlap with the previous category of "racial purity" groups, given Nazi policies. But, these groups went a good deal further in advocating close relations between Britain and Germany. Interestingly, the most prominent of these groups emerged during the late 1930's as relations between Britain and Germany grew increasingly tense. There was a divided response, amongst the extreme right, to the mounting anxiety of the late 1930's. By 1937-38, many on the extreme right had changed their outlook on the Nazi state. Even some prominent supporters of the BUF began to see Germany more as a dangerous threat than as a candidate for close alliance. There were others,

however, who responded to the increasing anxiety by throwing themselves even more intensively into pro-Nazism, founding or affiliating themselves with expressly pro-Nazi groups.

The first of these groups was founded in 1935 and called itself the Anglo-German Fellowship (AGF). This was an organization designed to promote cordial relations between Britain and Germany and to facilitate this through connections, information sharing, and business. The group was run by Elwin Wright, who would later be an outspoken anti-Semite for the Nordic League. But, the Anglo-German Fellowship presented itself as more of a vehicle for social connections for gentlemanly elites. As Griffiths writes, “The Fellowship was above all a society of business men, who, while not necessarily approving of all that went on in Germany, wished to maintain and improve commercial contacts.”⁵ Some of its most prominent members included Londonderry, Lord Lothian, Unity Mitford, and a number of executives from corporations like Firth-Vickers and Imperial Chemical Industries.

The next of the important Pro-Nazi groups was The Link, founded by the retired Naval Officer, Admiral Sir Barry Domvile. Unlike the AGF, the Link was much more open in its pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic agenda. The Link, for what it was, grew to a surprisingly large size during the late 1930’s, reaching a formal membership of over 4,300 by 1939. Like the British Union of Fascists from 1938-1940, it positioned itself as a peace movement, crying out against war with Germany. Their protests, however, lacked any noble sentiments, emphasizing mostly that the British were being pushed into war by the Jews who manipulated both government and the press.

The Unaffiliated and the Sense of Community

Not all on the extreme right, of course, were affiliated with particular organizations. There were doubtless many thousands who read extreme right publications at the breakfast table and

⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

voted for extreme right candidates, but left no records. But, even among those who did leave evidence for historians, many did not formally affiliate themselves with extreme right groups. The great press lord, Lord Rothermere, for example, owned and edited the nation's leading extreme right publication, *the Daily Mail*. Rotheremere was involved in extreme right politics through the Empire Free Trade Party and then openly supported Mosley's BUF. He withdrew that support in 1934 but, continued his far right campaigns with no formal affiliations until the coming of war. C.G. Grey owned and edited *The Aeroplane*, which was ostensibly the leading technical journal of the aviation industry. Grey, however, filled its pages with his extreme right political views and anti-Semitism. Despite this, there is no evidence that Grey ever formally affiliated himself with any of the extreme right organizations.

The reader should also understand that an affiliation with one group certainly did not constrain those on the far right from cooperation with other groups. It is clear that there was a sense of community and common cause among those on the extreme right. Very often we shall encounter members of the BUF or the Link making speeches at the meetings of other organizations. We shall see individuals associated with several of these groups at once, or changing affiliations over time. Likewise, we shall see publications like the *Saturday Review*, *Daily Mail*, or Mosley's *Action*, printing articles from the key figures from across the spectrum of extreme right opinion. There were exceptions to this cross-pollination, like the National Socialist League and its bitter rejection of Mosley. But, generally, the historian can identify a wider community across the many organizations and press outlets that formed the anatomy of Britain's extreme right.

Why Study Britain's Extreme Right and its Relationship to Modernity?

None of the parties, candidates, or organizations of the extreme right wing ever gained any meaningful measure of power. Despite support from some sitting MP's and some very prominent citizens, the far right made little headway in electoral politics. In view of this, the reasons for a detailed examination of this political tendency may not be readily apparent. But, this study does, in fact, intersect with some of the most critical areas of modern British history. The objectives of this dissertation, then, range from more focused issues like clarifying the far right's place in Britain's interwar struggle to much broader questions. These include the examination of Britain's advance into modernity, the vital question of Britain's economic/industrial decline, and questions about the essential character of the 20th century British state. As such, this study should be of interest to scholars of modern British politics, economic historians, historians of science and technology, as well as scholars studying 20th century authoritarianism.

The first objective of this work is to provide some contribution to a clearer picture of Britain's political struggle in the interwar years. The Conservative wing of British politics, while controlling the government for most of the interwar period, was not entirely unified. With the appearance of the Soviet Union and then the fascist dictatorships, right wing tendencies developed which challenged Tory Conservatism. One small minority within the party saw the dictatorships as a dangerous threat and urged the Government to confront them and to re-arm for an impending struggle. This group, which so outraged Chamberlain's inner circle, included notables like Winston Churchill, Harold MacMillan and Robert Boothby and sought leadership from Anthony Eden – a leadership he never really assumed. The other tendency had formed much earlier, creating the community we think of as the extreme right wing. This group

certainly shared many Conservative principles like dedication to Crown, Empire and private enterprise. But, it attacked Conservative politicians as weak and accommodating and urged Britain to not just appease, but to align itself with the fascist dictators. They just as adamantly, however, demanded that Britain re-arm and modernize in order to take its place as a Great Power alongside the fascist nations. This study will suggest that the extreme right hoped to hammer their agenda into reality through modern science and technology. Thus, our picture of this group will incline away from the view that this was a group of out-dated elites and lower middle class anti-modernists, who represented an obstacle to modernization. It will suggest instead that this group was primarily concerned with making Britain a “great technological nation”; lethal, self-sufficient, insulated, and racially pure. Despite some voices that called for a more anti-modern agenda (return to agriculture, anti-feminism, and a re-assertion of religious faith), I suggest that its authoritarian high- modernist impulse was predominant.

Connected with this, the extreme right was filled with prominent members of the aviation, automotive, telecommunications, and heavy industrial communities. Some of these found themselves excluded from the more “gentlemanly” culture of British business. But, some others emerged as leaders in Britain’s move into the modern age. Extreme right figures designed military aircraft, broke land speed records, won aviation trophies, and created the engineering for broadcast radio. All told, extreme right figures take a surprisingly important place among Britain’s eminent “moderns.” This has been somewhat under-researched. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, for instance, have recently edited a collection of articles which support the view that Britain’s modernization was very halting and uneven, occurring in partial

patches during the postwar era.⁶ The far right's place in the story, however, has been virtually left out of such studies. This is perhaps to be expected as many scholars are understandably reluctant to "credit" members of such an objectionable and discredited political community with any notion of progress. But, again, we must remember that "modernity" has more than one dimension. "Modern" does not necessarily mean positive, and there are many examples of modernist dreams or technocratic methods that have resulted in humanitarian disasters and suppression of individual rights.

Modernism, Culture, and Decline

The view of Britain's 20th century modernization as partial and incomplete has been endorsed by a number of historians, and until recently has been the prevailing academic interpretation. It has manifested itself in volumes of works which examine the supposed "decline" of British industry and power after the First World War. A central component of this "declinist" argument is the failure of British technology and manufacturing to keep pace with its global competitors. As such, scholars have sought explanations for this steady decline and have laid much blame at the doorstep of British culture. The "cultural critique," took shape with the publication of Anthony Sampson's book The Anatomy of Britain in 1962. It has come to be a classic of 20th century British history and was reprinted in updated editions until 1982. Sampson spent a great deal of his analysis dissecting the structures of the British establishment and suggested that the influence of traditional institutions was still quite powerful. Oxford and Cambridge, the City, Fleet Street, and of course the old establishment Clubs, all operated as a community that preserved the old values and "gentlemanly" culture. The "gentlemanly" elites that community produced, then,

⁶ Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds. Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964. (New York: NYU Press, 1998).

assumed their place in the worlds of business, industry, and politics, perpetuating their culture as opposed to embracing the hectic change of the postwar world.

Martin Wiener spelled out this interpretation much more concretely in his book English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850 – 1980, published in 1981. He argued that a general British ambivalence to industry and technology was a chief culprit in the nation’s 20th century industrial decline. He made it quite clear in the opening paragraph that economic/industrial decline is the most critical issue facing modern British historians. As he wrote, “The leading problem of modern British history is the explanation of economic decline,” and the roots of this “English disease,” ran “deep in the nation’s social structure and mental climate.”⁷ Wiener was justifiably criticized for an incomplete analysis of Britain’s 20th century economy and for struggling to prove direct connections between cultural trends and economic performance. Still, he used a wide variety of literary sources to shed light upon a shift in Britons’ mainstream attitudes toward their own industrial leadership that was well in place by the late Victorian period. The elites of the “directing strata,” he asserted, increasingly used their accumulated wealth to *retreat* from industry and to finance Oxbridge educations for their children in hopes that they could pursue more honorable careers. There developed a cult of the countryside as well as an obsession with gentlemanly status and respectability. This, said Wiener, contributed significantly to the conversion of Britain’s economy from one based upon manufacturing and technology to one increasingly dominated by services, financial investment, and the professions. This cultural shift in fundamental values diverted talent and resources away from the extension of British industrial power. This, in turn, according to Wiener, severely undermined innovation which held the key to future economic/industrial growth.

⁷ Martin Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.

If there is a center-piece of declinist scholarship, however, it is surely the four volume set of books on the subject written by Corelli Barnett. Barnett, over three decades of research and thousands of pages, identified what are now the “usual suspects,” of declinism in The Collapse of British Power (1972), The Audit of War (1987), The Lost Victory (1995), and finally The Verdict of Peace (2001). Reminiscent of Gibbon’s work on the decline of Rome, his interpretation begins with the growth of evangelical Christianity in the 19th century and its penetration into traditional institutions like the public schools and Oxbridge. This created a leadership class which was unsuited to maintain British power in an increasingly competitive world. Their ethics were gentle and their educations “literary, linguistic, remote from real life.” Indoctrinated with the traditions of a classical education, areas like science, technology, industry, and economic *realpolitik* were ignored, as “the modern side of education was seen as the refuge of the second rate.”⁸ Unsuitable for the rigors of power politics, British elites were also woefully under-qualified to lead in the new industries of the Second Industrial Revolution (such as chemicals, petroleum, electricity, mass production). In British industry from 1870 to 1940, Barnett writes, “here clanked on tirelessly not only the actual machines, but...the techniques and outlook of 1815-1850...quaint memorials of the original Industrial Revolution.”⁹

But, Barnett does not stop with the problems of traditional institutions and outlooks. He also sees disastrous consequences stemming from Britain’s attachment to 19th century liberalism. The institutional emphasis upon individual freedoms and free markets “criticized and finally demolished the traditional conception of the nation-state as a collective organism, a community,

⁸ Corelli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power. (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 27, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

and asserted instead the primacy of the individual.”¹⁰ This resistance to change, and associated absence of a “Total-strategy” for the future, led eventually to unpreparedness for war, a punishing war experience, and an inability to capitalize on Britain’s victory. In the decades following the Second World War, says Barnett

They were short of skills owing to a deficient education and a training system long overdue for reconstruction. They lacked adaptability and ambition in comparison with the Americans: lacked energy, discipline, and enterprise in comparison with the West Germans...their industrial, social, educational and bureaucratic structures alike were disjointed, desperately slow in decision and action, and deeply resistant to change.¹¹

These traits, he writes, were particularly pronounced in the area of high technology, where “academic proficiency continued to be prized above practical capability, the humanities above science, ‘pure science’ above technology, and technological pioneering per se above eventual market success.”¹² As a direct result, Britain lacked the industrial and military might to back up its attempts to assert its power in postwar global politics. The “verdict of peace,” he says, “finds the British people and their leaders guilty of failing to confront total-strategic reality, and instead finally confirming Britain in a fateful pattern of national overambition coupled with its industrial underperformance.”¹³

As influential as this interpretation has been, is such a sweeping indictment justified? This view is currently undergoing considerable revision, and the particular props of the argument are being subjected to closer scrutiny. The first important salvo in the dismantling of the declinist paradigm came from W. D. Rubinstein in his book Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

¹¹ Corelli Barnett, The Verdict of Peace. (London: Macmillan, 2001), p. xvi.

¹² Ibid., p. xvii.

¹³ Ibid., p. xvii.

published in 1993. Rubinstein's argument focused upon the mistake of interpreting the rise of finance and service capitalism as necessarily corresponding with a decline of industrial manufacturing. The assumption that Britain's had been a predominantly techno-industrial economy in the 19th century was the root of the problem. Rubinstein set out his argument as follows:

Britain's was *never* fundamentally an industrial and manufacturing economy; rather it was *always*, even at the height of the industrial revolution, essentially a commercial, financial, and services-based economy whose comparative advantage always lay with commerce and finance. Britain's apparent industrial decline was simply a working out of this process, a working out which...was manifestly coincidental with a continuing rise in the average standard of living in Britain rather than with decline...the 'cultural critique' is radically misconceived indeed; in moving from industry to commerce, Britain's entrepreneurs were responding intelligently to realistically perceived opportunities. This movement, therefore, had little or nothing to do with any factor in Britain's underlying culture, elite educational system, or fundamental system of values, but, was again an entirely rational economic response.¹⁴

So, the gradual transition of Britain's economic emphasis from manufacturing to finance/services from the late Victorian period up to the Second World War had much more to do with practical capitalism than with some innate British aversion to technology.

David Edgerton has recently published the most thorough response to the declinist school, but with a quite different emphasis than Rubinstein. In an earlier work, England and the Aeroplane (1991) and then in Warfare State: Britain 1920-1970 (2006) he argues that Britain's industrial economy quite simply did *not* decline in the 20th century. Rather than a beleaguered nation which declined economically due to increasing social legislation, Britain remained one of the world's most powerful modern nations. In private enterprise or consumer manufacturing, Britain may have lost its Victorian preeminence to the United States and the Soviet Union. But, even so, this represented only some level of "relative decline" rather than any decline in absolute terms.

¹⁴ W. D. Rubinstein, Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 24.

In the public sphere, however, Britain demonstrated its most remarkable innovation and expansion. In areas like aviation and military technology Britain continued to forge ahead, building a powerful military-industrial complex and a modernized bureaucracy of technical experts. Therefore, those scholars attempting to explain the “welfare state” and industrial decline in the consumer economy are ignoring the parallel development of a mighty, technology-based defense industry that made Britain one of the world’s most powerful states.

This historiographical debate is quite important for this study. Declinism is a powerful force in British historiography and, as Edgerton maintains, was not simply a left wing phenomenon. This work will demonstrate that the declinist outlook was an essential part of far right wing ideology. In the pages that follow we shall see the broad outlines of the postwar declinist argument emerge from the collective discourse of the extreme right. From the fears of waning industrial strength, to the anger at finance capitalism, from the exasperation with Britain’s public school/Oxbridge elite, to the panic over Britain’s supposed military inadequacy, the essential components of the declinist view took shape within the collective dialogue of the extreme right wing before the Second World War.

Throughout the chapters and in the Conclusion section we will examine the vital question of whether the extreme right was correct in its criticism. What did this group get right? What did they get wrong? How did they hope to use their declinist attack in putting forward their own particular variant of “high modernism”?

Organization

Most of the work that has probed the British extreme right’s relationship to modernity has focused upon the explicitly fascist groups, and the BUF in particular. Therefore, Chapter One, “The Modern Movement,” will look closely at the development of the British fascist

organizations and their programs. It will focus mostly upon the political platforms of these groups and suggest that their proposed policies were in fact quite modernist, emphasizing the importance of science and technology in expanding Britain's industrial economy and national defense. The very areas picked out for policy campaigns indicate a modernist approach. Groups like the New Party and the BUF, for instance, laid out detailed plans for medical care, modern highways, aviation, birth control, urban renewal, and scientific research. That these areas held such importance in their public appeals, is significant.

The second half of the first chapter will examine the modern and the anti-modern aspects of British fascism in broader context. Much work has been done, particularly by the intellectual historian Dan Stone, on the "back to the soil" movement among Britain's right wing. Stone, in a number of works, identifies several figures and organizations that created the image of the extreme right as a more traditionalist movement, longing for a return to agriculture and the ways of "Merrie England." The particular groups he emphasized, however, were those who held less extreme views and which were almost completely uninvolved in active politics. The policies and rhetoric of groups like the New Party, the IFL, and the BUF certainly re-enforce the priority that British fascism placed on a renewed agriculture. But, it was to be a "modernized" agriculture. Despite the voices of individuals like Lord Lyvington and groups like the British Mistery, most British fascist discussion on agriculture called for intensified mechanization, mass production methods, and state sponsored scientific research stations. Only such a modernized approach to field production could produce the economies of scale needed to secure Britain's food supply in a world of fearful uncertainty.

After closer scrutiny of these anti-modern elements of British fascism, the chapter will conclude by giving the BUF some broader context, examining a contemporary movement in the

United States. This was the Technocracy movement of the 1930's. The American Technocracy movement remained fragmented and difficult to generalize. Still, its pursuit of an industrially organized government (essentially corporatism), a strengthened executive, and new world order run by technicians, look quite similar to the BUF's vision. This ultra-modern movement at first disparaged fascism, but by 1933-4 there are examples of its most prominent leaders holding mass rallies, wearing uniforms and giving fascist salutes. Both movements, as we shall see, shared the high modernist dream of regimenting the nation by means of science and technology. They also recognized that such machine-like order could only be brought about through authoritarian methods. In retrospect, then, the BUF compares much more closely to the ultra-modern Technocracy movement than it does to the nostalgic or anti-modern groups of interwar Britain.

Chapter Two, "In a Crash-helmet, Not a Top Hat," seeks to establish the deep connection between the extreme right community and the world of the new technologies. It focuses especially on those fascists and pro-fascists who were key figures in the "New Industries," like aviation, the automotive industry, and radio communications. It also asserts that there was an intellectual connection between the extreme right desire for powerful, decisive political action and the power and efficacy of modern machinery. While this was never said explicitly in pro-fascist discourse, it was expressed time and again through metaphor. Extreme right campaigns, news coverage, speeches, and even policy are filled with the language of technology. There are numerous descriptions of the dictators as being at the controls of state, or of forged steel walls protecting the nation. Conversely, liberal democracy and socialism are often described in terms of outdated automobiles, rusting factories, or as highways leading nowhere. This connection is also borne out by the consistent efforts of far right figures to go faster, higher, and farther. From international aviation trophies, to breaking land speed records, from individual long distance

flying, to 100 mph train travel, the extreme right community was obsessed with the importance of pushing past existing limits. The metaphorical smashing of “outdated” barriers was reflected in their political language as well.

Chapter Two is principally, though, an introduction to some of the most important figures on the extreme right. It will act as a kind of *dramatis personae* to the individuals, parties, and publications which will be examined through the rest of the work. As such, it is a series of brief biographical sketches without deep dissection of the extreme right rhetoric. That task will be tackled in the chapters that follow. But, Chapter Two will demonstrate that a significant number of the key figures in Britain’s high-tech. community were also those who funded extreme right organizations, controlled its press, and shaped its political agenda.

Chapter Three, “Hitler’s Wonderland,” will review a particular genre of literature that proliferated in Britain from the late 1920’s through the 1930’s. There were numerous political tracts, journal articles, and travel logs, which described the world of the fascist dictatorships in glowing terms (at least from extreme right wing authors). One of the salient features of pro-fascist writing was the great admiration these authors had for the modernization projects of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Their works were filled with descriptions of aviation tours, factory towns, the great ocean liners, modernist architecture, the cleanliness and order of fascist cities, and cutting edge medical care. Engineering feats like Germany’s autobahn, or high speed trains struck right wing commentators as evidence that the fascist political system had mastered technology and put it to work bettering the lives of ordinary people. Here we gain some insight into the visual power and persuasive potential of grand engineering and high technology. Some of those giant works were legitimate technical masterpieces, but just as often the fascist states used the outward appearances of clean new settlements, highways, or air-shows to cover

inefficiency, upheaval, or war preparations. Regardless, most extreme right authors took these visible structures or machines as tangible proof that fascism was truly “the modern movement.”

Chapter Four is entitled “Sheer Barnacle Habits of Mind,” and describes the extreme right’s exasperation with Britain’s liberal democracy. Here we find technological modernity a key area of policy debate and questions of national infrastructure an important political battlefield. The far right launched assaults on things like the supposed ineptitude of Britain’s emerging highway system, its irrational planning, and execution. There were attacks on the poor infrastructure for Britain’s aerodromes, and scathing criticism of the government monopoly of the commercial airline industry. Far right writers also attacked supposed government incompetence in managing the BBC’s broadcasting monopoly. In all of these areas, the far right positioned itself as the movement of change and action, while depicting the existing political parties as clear obstacles to progress. Britain’s politicians, they believed, were completely uninformed, uninterested and misguided about issues of modern technology – issues which had emerged as the most important of national questions. Thus, said far right critics, they were unqualified to govern the nation. They were the products of an obsolete political system. Liberal democracy and financial capitalism were long outdated and only a new system, which put technicians in charge of such questions, could face modern challenges effectively.

Chapter Five, “Britain Defenseless!” takes a closer look at that same political attack specifically in the area of national defense. The strategy of using science and technology as a platform for discrediting the government was used to its utmost in the debate over re-armament. Here it is important to remember that the extreme right world view saw the dictatorships as worthy of admiration and amity. But, Britain’s first obligation was to protect itself in an uncertain world by massive re-armament. This was a course which would in no way, they

believed, undermine friendly alliance between Britain and the dictatorships. Fascists shared the belief that any Great Power worthy of respect must be lethally armed. The chapter will go on to examine the extensive campaign by retired Major-General J.F.C. Fuller to push the British Army into mechanization and that of Admiral Sir Barry Domvile to modernize the Navy. Finally, the loudest campaign of all concerned Britain's air forces. A tiny air force, legions of infantry and rusting ships, they said, would be useless against the modern war machines. The ineptitude of democratic politicians and pig-headed military minds were placing the nation in peril. Again, they said, this was the inevitable result of an outdated system and the outdated men it produced.

The final chapter, "An Insulated Britain," examines the extreme right obsession with what I call "exclusive nationalism," though I do not claim to have coined the term. The first expression of this ethos of insulation, ironically, was the fierce attachment to Britain's worldwide Empire. The resources of the Empire held the key to Britain's potential economic self-sufficiency as well as its position as a global power. Technology provided a crucial means to bind that Empire together and preserve its integrity. Advances like global radio communications and long distance aviation could shrink the distances and help create one great "imperial family." Technology could also be used, and *was* used by the extreme right, as a means of displaying Britain's power to its colonial peoples. Engineering projects or feats of technological daring, such as the Mount Everest flights, were meant to remind resisting colonials that Britain was "top dog," and to discourage any thoughts of autonomy.

With the Empire intact, Britain could use colonial resources to end dependence upon foreign materials, foreign products, foreign markets, and foreign capital. Mosley's vision of an autarkic economy has been well documented, but this dream of self-sufficiency extended throughout the extreme right community. Calls for "British goods for British ships," and "Britain First!" were

ubiquitous. There was also praise for the fascist dictatorships' moves toward autarky, and especially the ingenuity of German and Italian scientific industries in finding raw material substitutes. Once economic autarky was achieved, the far right said, it could only be protected through a lethal modern defense. Weapons of destruction, like bombers, tanks, and battleships would not be used for unwarranted attack, but would act as the ultimate deterrent to any potential aggressor. Along these lines, extreme right discourse was filled with the language and images of protection and insularity. The chapter concludes by examining the language of exclusive nationalism as it appeared in poems, news coverage, and political cartoons. The numerous images of walls, shields, fences, and moats highlighted the extreme right's increasing fear of alien threats – whether they were outside aggressors, or “foreign elements” which could corrode the national metal from the inside.

CHAPTER TWO

“THE MODERN MOVEMENT”

British Fascism, Science and the Question of Modernity

The question of modernity among the extreme right community has been most researched in the context of explicit British fascism. The fascist parties of Britain, and most especially the BUF, were only the most radical sector of the broader extreme right tendency. But, this chapter will specifically address the relationship between technological modernity and the genuinely fascist groups in Britain between the wars. There is a surprisingly wide and rich literature surrounding British fascism given its utter failure in electoral politics. Some critics see this as an excessive treatment of a movement with allegedly questionable relevance to British affairs during the period. Others, like this author, find it remarkable that fascism could have created the impact that it did in the very birthplace of modern representative government.

These parties produced a vast amount of published material, allowing historians to identify a relatively coherent ideology and political agenda. But, despite this wealth of campaign material, personal correspondence, party manifestos, and press material, scholars have not reached a consensus about the modernity (or anti-modernity) of the British fascist movement. Robert Skidelsky was the first to enunciate this tension in his biography Oswald Mosley, published in 1975. He wrote that

To the historian, fascism is Janus-faced. One face looks forward, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, to the rational control of human life, the other face looks backward to a much simpler, more primitive life...It is idle to deny that this tension existed in fascism. In fact it constituted its basic contradiction. It is the existence of this contradiction which makes it such a difficult, and at the same time, such a fascinating modern phenomenon...Fascism arose from the confrontation and attempted fusion of the two impulses—the quest for modernization and the revolt against its consequences.¹⁵

¹⁵ Robert Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley. (New York: Holt, Winston & Rinehart, 1975), p.299.

This juxtaposition has prompted a few historians of British fascism to probe this modern/anti-modern tension as a specific site of research and, according to Thomas Linehan, “has generated important insights into the nature of Mosleyite fascism.”¹⁶ This study hopes in part to do the same. Leslie Susser is another who has studied British fascism’s conflicted identity, focusing on its embrace of modern technology on one hand, and its rejection of modernism in the arts on the other. The conclusion in his article “Fascism, Literary Modernism and Modernization,” is similar to Skidelsky’s: British fascism was hopelessly torn between the modern and anti-modern.

Other scholars, however, have emphasized the anti-modern position in their studies. Linehan, for instance, despite his acknowledgement of the tension between the two attitudes, stressed the anti-industrial and anti-urban current in British Fascism. In his book British Fascism 1918-1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture (2000), he includes a chapter entitled, “The City, the Countryside, and the Machine.” Here he quotes the British fascist disgust with the tyranny of industry, mechanization, and the ruin of British agriculture. At the end of his chapter, however, Linehan correctly reminds us that Mosley was himself an advocate of modernization and futuristic technology. Thus, he writes, “on closer examination, this hostility towards the machine reveals itself not to be a blanket condemnation of the machine age and modernity, but a critique of particular variants of it, namely those models prompted by liberal capitalism and communism.”¹⁷ But, he says, the BUF was never able to reconcile its own tension in this area, and so “we have that advocate of technological modernism and scientific progress, Oswald Mosley, attacking the

¹⁶ Thomas P. Linehan, British Fascism 1918-1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.94.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 263.

legacy of the Industrial Revolution, singing the praises of a bygone mythical age of Merrie England and waxing lyrical about the virtues of the countryside and the soil and the need to return to it.”¹⁸ This chapter will probe this question further and suggest that attacks upon science, technology, and industry represented a minority view of overall fascist opinion on the subject. British fascist discourse, and especially the parties’ published policies, made the embrace of science and technology a fundamental objective. This will challenge Linehan’s final assertion that “Apprehension about the machine and the machine age was prevalent in British fascist discourse.”¹⁹

Dan Stone is less equivocal in his view of British fascism and the far right. In his appraisal, the far right was predominantly concerned with turning back the march of modernity and rationality. As an historian of ideas, Stone, in a group of works, has emphasized the strands of thought in Britain’s far right that reach back into the Victorian and Edwardian eras.²⁰ The core ideology of British fascism, according to this line of reasoning, was deeply rooted in Britain’s past, not in foreign ideas seemingly better suited to modern conditions. He calls this group of radical right wing beliefs, “extremes of Englishness.” He especially looks at the “back to the soil” campaign as an important component of this ethos of anti-modernism. That campaign will be re-examined at the end of this chapter in an effort to better understand the seemingly anti-

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁹ Thomas Linehan, British Fascism 1918-1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), p. 257.

²⁰ See Dan Stone, Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000) and Dan Stone, Responses to Nazism in Britain 1933-1939, Before War and Holocaust. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) and Dan Stone, “The Far Right and the Back-to-the-Land Movement,” in Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan eds. The Culture of Fascism: The Visions of the Far Right in Britain. (London: IB Taurus, 2004), pp. 182-198.

modern elements of British fascism within their proper context. But, for Stone, in the final analysis, the tension between anti-modern and modern never really was that conflicted, and the movement was rooted chiefly in anti-modernism. As he concludes, “on the right, fascism in Britain never really achieved the ‘reactionary modernist’ synthesis that characterized Nazism, and stayed essentially a nostalgic, reactionary movement.”²¹

There have been only a few studies of British fascism that focus on the modernity of the movement. Until very recently, Linehan’s chapter “The City, Countryside, and the Machine,” was the only work that looked with real penetration at the place of science and technological modernity within the movement. In 2006, however, Julie Gottlieb published an article examining the BUF’s very modern production of consumer commodities. Their merchandising effort helped spread the message of fascism and promoted the cult of the “Leader.”²² Her article is perhaps an early indication of a shift in scholarly interpretation toward seeing British fascism as a predominantly modern movement. This chapter will not deny that a tension between the modern and anti-modern existed in British fascism. But, it will make the assertion, taking Gottlieb’s assertions further, that those in the movement most often saw themselves as championing a newly rationalist and modernist ideology.

British Fascism before Mosley

The first explicitly fascist organization in Britain was the British *Fascisti*, whose name later changed to the British Fascists (BF). This group was founded by Rotha Lintorn-Orman in 1923,

²¹ Stone, Responses to Nazism in Britain 1933-1939, Before War and Holocaust, p. 151.

²² Julie Gottlieb, “The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption, and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 41(1), 2006: 35-55.

borne of her breathless admiration for Mussolini's Italian Fascism. The group adopted the wearing of uniforms and marching in formation, but lacked any serious embrace of Fascist principles beyond extreme nationalism and anti-Communism. The British Fascists were adamant about the retention of private enterprise and saw Marxism as the most threatening force to the world. The group also fiercely supported the monarchy and Britain's Empire, dogmatically protesting any diminution of British authority in the colonies.

The BF program was not particularly well defined, nor particularly focused on activism. Its President was Brigadier-General Robert Blakeney, a former soldier and businessman, trained in engineering, who had formerly managed the Egyptian State Railway. In Blakeney's voice, through the BF press, we can first hear the modern side of British fascism making its case. Britain had to be modernized, said Blakeney, if the nation was to avoid being trampled by its world competitors –and especially by the Soviets. The United States and the Soviet Union, he wrote, “have recently remodeled their machinery, and equipped themselves with financial munitions.”²³ Britain could not risk falling behind. To face these kinds of harsh realities of the world crisis, said Blakeney, fascists possessed the proper scientific spirit to examine the difficult questions objectively. As he said, “Our doctrines being what they are, and largely concerned with questions of economics and sociology, we have the benefit of growing scientific habits of mind and examining evidence critically. That is all to the good. We know that it is only by scientifically attacking all the problems of the present day that there is any chance of solving them.”²⁴

²³ R. B. D. Blakeney, “The Need for British Fascism,” *British Fascism*, June 20th, 1925, p. 1.

²⁴ R. B. D. Blakeney, “Fascism and Science” *British Fascism*, July, 1926, p. 8.

Blakeney and his followers would create a schism in the group when the opportunity finally arose for the BF to take an active part in British politics. That opportunity came with the General Strike of 1926. As the Government rushed to assemble the OMS to keep supplies running throughout Britain during the strike, Blakeney and his faction decided the BF must contribute. Lintorn-Orman, however, was reluctant to become actively or officially involved. In the days of the strike some of Blakeney's following were active contributors to the Government's cause, driving trucks, loading produce and providing security against possible union interference. The conflict between Lintorn-Orman's faction and Blakeney's resulted in a large contingent of the BF leaving to find homes within other extreme right organizations. These included the "Nordic League" and the "Britons," both of which based their agendas on radical racial purity. Most defectors, however, like Blakeney himself, joined the Imperial Fascist League, headed by the rabid anti-Semite, Arnold Leese. Through the late 1920's the British Fascists continued to unravel and Lintorn-Orman eventually died in March of 1935 of alcoholism, her party all but defunct.

Leese was a former member of the BF as well, but left because of his view that the BF was not genuinely fascist. He derided Lintorn-Orman's preference for uniforms and banners instead of active and extreme politics. He and Blakeney would eventually conclude that the BF was only an amplified Toryism. As Leese would say later, the BF was simply "Conservatism with knobs on." His Imperial Fascist League, though, was unmistakably fascist, and closely resembled its continental counterparts. What was especially lacking in the BF, said Leese, was a true understanding of the great struggle between racial groups that defined world history. Leese's fascism was intensely racially based. He looked to the Nazi party in Germany as the best example of true fascism, and even adopted the swastika superimposed upon the Union Jack

as his party's principal symbol. Until the emergence of Mosley's British Union of Fascists in 1932, Leese's party was the most important of the small fascist parties in Britain.

Leese was born in Lancashire in 1877 and at an early age took an interest in animals and biology. As a young man he began working with coal ponies suffering from various ailments around the Lancashire pits. He eventually decided to go into animal medicine and attended veterinary college, graduating in 1903. He moved to London in 1905 and opened his own practice. He established that practice in the East End of London and worked there from 1905 to 1908. Although he says next to nothing about this formative period in his autobiography, Out of Step: Events in the Two Lives of an Anti-Jewish Camel Doctor, one can surmise that the East End introduced him to the Jewish community on a wide scale.²⁵ In the early Edwardian period thousands of Jewish immigrants, mostly from Eastern Europe, streamed into London's East End. This would result in serious tensions over the decades and was the chief reason that the East End became such a center for BUF anti-Semitism in the 1930's. Leese left his practice after 1908 to return to school, taking courses in research science. It was this background that helped him land a position in the Colonial Service. He was assigned first to India where he worked in the Mutkasen Imperial Laboratory researching camels in desert conditions. His specialty was the research of local fleas and insects and their relationship to animal diseases. In 1913 he was transferred to Kenya to continue his research on camels and horses. His research often took him into the desert for long stretches to observe the animals in wild habitats. When the First World War began he remained in East Africa caring for the military pack animals and becoming an operating surgeon. At war's end he returned to England, setting up a large-animal practice in

²⁵ Arnold Leese, Out of Step: Events in the Two Lives of an Anti Jewish Camel Doctor, Unpublished typed manuscript, F.T. Cooper papers , 181/1/27.

Stamford and District and beginning work on a medical textbook on the camel, which after publication remained the definitive work on the subject for many decades.

He retired from veterinary practice in 1928 at which point he embarked full time on his political career. What had set him on his course was hearing Arthur Kitson speak in the 1920's on the subject of monetary reform. Kitson was an industrialist who manufactured the elaborate electronic systems for light houses. He railed against the power of City finance, which he said controlled and undermined those who actually produced and innovated. Mussolini, said Kitson, had found the formula for subordinating finance to the state which could then direct both industry and finance to work only for the benefit of the nation. Leese was captivated and experienced a "political awakening." Kitson was, of course, describing Mussolini's corporatist system. Mussolini had created a system in Italy where a chamber of industry-wide organizations were established with councils that included industrial management, technical experts, labor representatives and Fascist Party representatives. These "corporations," then would weigh consumer demand, worker's issues, and national priorities in formulating policies that would apply to all companies involved in that particular industry. These decisions would include production levels, working conditions, mechanization, and wage levels. Strikes had been outlawed in Italy to prevent damage to the national economy, but theoretically with labor representation in corporations and the power of finance constrained, the interests of labor and management could be reconciled. Mussolini's system seemed to some to represent a modern solution to the class war. In Britain during the 1920's the class war was raging. The coal crisis seemed interminable and the General Strike of 1926 alarmed many, including Leese. Further, socialist Labour had grown into a strong political party even establishing Governments in 1924

and 1929. For rabid anti-Communists like Leese the corporatist system seemed the perfect antidote to socialism – it appeared to end class conflict while preserving private enterprise.

After Leese left the BF in disgust and established the IFL, he made the corporate state one of the center pieces of his political program. Although Leese was not particularly modern in his attitudes to issues like women’s participation, he made the reorganization of industry and its modern development his party’s core objective. Leese aimed to take Mussolini’s Confederation of Industry a step further. Mussolini had preserved the Italian parliament as a political chamber, although by the late 1920’s it was nothing more than a party congress. Leese, however, would make Britain’s House of Commons into a chamber of industrial corporations. In the IFL’s pamphlet that outlined its program, Leese described what this would look like in a fascist Britain.

The new political unit is industrial and economic. Every candidate of the Lower Industrial house (the Fascist equivalent of the House of Commons) qualifies therefore not as an orator, but as an expert in that particular branch of national activity....Six national Federations would exist

- Industry
- Agriculture
- Commerce
- Sea Transport
- Land Transport
- Finance²⁶

Leese was also fanatic about the elimination of parties which would undermine the decisive action of the executive. The Upper House, therefore, would be appointed by the King. The IFL’s system would also include a Prime Minister, but the PM would be responsible only to the

²⁶ “Imperial Fascist League: Fascism – Its Principles” May 8th, 1931, F.T. Cooper Papers, 181/2/32.



Arnold Leese, former colonial veterinarian, researcher, and soldier and eventual founder of the Imperial Fascist League. He always maintained that he pursued his studies “with the same scientific spirit as when I was investigating animal diseases in the world’s deserts. The photo above is from his scurrilous book, *Jewish Ritual Murder*.

King, not the Upper House or the Lower Industrial House. Still, the great majority of national issues would be examined and legislated by the technical experts in the Industrial House. As IFL author H. H. Lockwood wrote in his piece titled, “Britain’s Future,” the solution, “to our minds, is simple. Place electoral power in the hands of those actually engaged in industry of one form or another be it agriculture, engineering, or the various professions.”²⁷ As early as the late 1920’s then, the British fascist vision was taking shape as a technocracy.

But, Leese was a fanatical anti-Semite and the technocratic philosophy was for him connected directly to the menace of the Jews. It was finance capital that controlled and perverted the productive and distributive functions of British industry. Finance capital, he was entirely convinced, was dominated by Jews. These Jews, he believed, cared nothing for the British nation, but only for their own personal enrichment and the continued accumulation of power in the hands of the Jewish “race.” Eventually they would subject the entire world through their financial control of all its resources, and the other races would simply become slaves to Jewish capital. Leese was a firm believer in a world Jewish conspiracy supposedly exposed in the tract called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (now known to be a forgery), which the IFL would reprint and distribute. Leese would also write several of his own anti-Jewish propaganda tracts like the obscene *Jewish Ritual Murder* which detailed the supposed practice of Jews drinking the blood of gentiles. But, seeing himself as a man of science—trained in veterinary medicine and scientific research—he firmly believed his anti-Semitism was steeped in modern scientific principles. As he wrote in his autobiography, after awakening to the reality of Jewish financial domination, “I have been conducting a research on the Jew Menace ever since; and I wish here to emphasize that I have done it in the same scientific spirit as when I was investigating camel

²⁷ H. H. Lockwood, “Britain’s Future,” *The Fascist*, May, 1930, p. 3.

diseases in the world's deserts.”²⁸ However ridiculous and malevolent Leese's fascist program, IFL discourse does not use the language of returning to a past age or of turning back the clock. Rather, Leese emphasized the point that fascists turned a coldly rational, scientific eye on the economic and racial crises of the day. Only with such an objective approach, he said, could Britons unemotionally recognize the disturbing realities that others were supposedly too weak or irrational to face. It is a claim that will appear time and again as we examine the writing and careers of far right figures throughout this study.

Mosley, the New Party and the BUF

Leese's IFL was almost totally eclipsed by the arrival of Oswald Mosley's New Party in 1931 and then the British Union of Fascist in 1932. Mosley had the credibility from a long parliamentary career and the personal charisma to attract most of the fascist community away from smaller groups like the BF and the IFL. After 1932, then, it was the British Union of Fascists (later British Union, and finally the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists) that dominated fascist activity in Britain throughout the 1930's.

Mosley was born to a family of minor nobility near Manchester in 1896. He was educated at Winchester College and then at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. As a lad of eighteen he joined the 16th Queen's Lancers as the First World War began, but soon after volunteered for the newly formed Royal Flying Corps. He was trained as a flyer, but worked as an Observer behind enemy lines in the highly dangerous job of aerial reconnaissance. Fascists would later make much of Mosley's daring and his headlong plunge into the “new age” of flight. A.K. Chesterton wrote of him in his promotional biography Oswald Mosley: Portrait of a Leader: “So rapidly did he contrive his transfer that...he was flying over the German lines as an observer

²⁸ Leese, Out of Step, p. 51.

before the end of that year. Among the first hundred airmen to leave for France, he was one of the very few to survive. One visualizes the young Oswald Mosley of those early days of the war exulting in the thrill and audacity of the ‘planes, deriding danger, defying death.’²⁹ His flying career was cut short, however, as he crashed his plane while home, showing off his skills for his mother. The crash resulted in a serious leg injury which left him with a limp for the rest of his life. His enthusiasm for the new technology, though, would stay with him and help him to attract airmen and engineers to his political groups in later years.

After the War Mosley stood for Parliament as a Conservative and was elected in the 1918 election, making him the youngest member of the House. It is noteworthy that he made his maiden speech in the House on the impending Aviation Bill of 1919.³⁰ He rankled his Conservative colleagues however, as he protested against the use of the Black and Tans in suppressing the Irish. In 1924, as Labour formed its first Government, he crossed the floor to join that party. Next to the distinctly un-glamorous trade union bosses, Mosley was a rising star in Labour along with his wife, Cynthia, who also had won a seat in Parliament. When Labour again formed a Government in 1929, Mosley was given a minor position as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Despite his obscure post, Mosley was put on an important committee, under the guidance of Jimmy Thomas, to solve the unemployment problem. Mosley was an early adherent to the ideas of John Maynard Keynes, and included several “Keynesian” strategies in his recommendations to attack the problem of Britain’s unemployed. These included deficit borrowing and spending on the part of the government and the initiation of public works on a wide scale. Mosley found his ideas often ignored or suppressed by Thomas and as a result

²⁹ A. K. Chesterton, Oswald Mosley: Portrait of a Leader (London: Action Press, 1937), p. 17.

³⁰ See Colin Cook, “A Fascist Memory: Oswald Mosley and the Myth of the Airman,” *European Review of History*, No. 4, 1997, p. 148.

Mosley decided to create his own proposal: the “Mosley Memorandum.” The Labour Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and Chancellor of the Exchequer Phillip Snowden, was committed to the strategies of classical economics. They were far more concerned with balancing the budget in order to restore Britain’s credit abroad. This, they believed would restore Britain’s ability to borrow cheaply and so boost exports, which would result in a general upturn. Eventually the Cabinet rejected the “Mosley Memorandum” outright, opting instead to cut back on social programs rather than expand them. Exasperated with the Government’s intractability on the subject, Mosley decided to resign his post and later resigned from the Labour Party altogether. Upon his resignation in late May of 1930 he made a passionate speech to the Commons in which he outlined the policies he had recommended to the Government. His proposals, his condemnation of the Government’s inaction, and his ability as an orator made the speech a popular success. In the days following his speech, Mosley consolidated the ideas he had assembled while in the Government into a more formalized policy statement, known as the “Mosley Manifesto.” With this he attempted to persuade the delegates of the Labour Party Conference in October of that year. The Manifesto now included formal protection for British producers in the form of steep tariffs and nationalization of selected industries. It also included the formation of a smaller executive committee to serve as a Cabinet, resembling the streamlined War Cabinet formed by David Lloyd George during the Great War. Having resigned from the Government, though, many in Labour saw him as a traitor to the cause, and he was soundly defeated at the Party Conference.

He decided to establish his own political party which he hoped could blast through the “old gang’s” outdated political culture. He was in a unique position to accomplish this having risen to stardom with his famous Mosley Manifesto and his extremely popular resignation speech. Some

felt he possessed the support and the charisma to become Prime Minister. But, in a democratically mature nation such as Britain, where political parties were so thoroughly entrenched, a newly formed party would have a long fight on its hands to make any inroads. Many close to him in parliament must have understood this, when, despite their sympathies, they chose not to join his New Party, formally launched on March 1, 1931. Only four sitting M.P.'s, including Mosley's wife Cynthia, chose to resign from their own parties to join Mosley's. This small group also included John Strachey, a notable socialist writer and theorist, as well as W. E. D. Allen, a Unionist M.P. from Ulster, and Robert Forgan. Despite its tiny number of initial members, the party grew to the point where it could contest elections by late 1931. The first was a by-election at Ashton-under-Lynde, where the New Party candidate polled 16% of the vote, splitting the Labour vote and allowing a Conservative to retain his seat. Undaunted, the party pressed on with a vigorous campaign and contested twenty four seats in the General Election of 1931. But, that contest was a disaster for Mosley's organization with not a single candidate elected. Mosley was the only candidate who tallied a meaningful percentage, but even he lost his seat.

The New Party's impact on British politics was obviously negligible, but it was the embryo of what would become the British Union of Fascists. Its program was firmly based on the collection of policies put forward by Mosley in his resignation speech and in the "Mosley Manifesto." But it also adopted the idea of an industrially based parliamentary system, which though rather vaguely explained, was a form of corporatism. In a list of the Party's principles, industrial reorganization was explained as follows:

The NEW ORDER should be a society in which authority is distributed and power decentralized according to function instead of being based on class traditions and privileges...industry should be the self-governing, productive function of the community, and those industries should be the self-governing units within that function...the Guilds

should be represented in a National Economic Chamber, where estimates for production would be based on the needs of the consumers, which would be the only motive for, and limit to, production, national or international.³¹

Above all it called for a “National policy” to deal with the scale of economic disaster that seemed to be devouring Britain.

Throughout the New Party’s written materials the language of modernity and the sense of new beginning were ever-present. From the party’s very name, “New Party,” to the focus on the reorganization of industry, and the emphasis upon modern scientific methods, New Party rhetoric is unmistakably modernist. The party pamphlet, *The Meaning of New Britain* makes it clear that Britain has entered a new age and that new methods must be adopted to manage and cope with it.

There is a growing body of men and women of good will who see clearly that the old order, with its false moral canons and exploded economic principles, must yield place to a new order; men and women who, looking below the surface, realize that a new era is upon us...Do we overemphasize the new era? Nothing less will rescue us from the unhappy posture in which we find ourselves today...How all that is here suggested is to be brought about, has been the subject of anxious thoughts on the part of those responsible for the principles and methods of the NEW BRITAIN...we know now with certainty that competitive capitalism has exhausted its mission.³²

To meet the challenges of the new era, said New Party rhetoric, government would have to understand the “new facts” science had placed before mankind. Mosley often described science in terms of a disembodied, autonomous force that marched endlessly forward. But, he also made the point that a new form of government could master, control, and harness science for the common good. This thinking, which he would intensify in BUF works, appears earlier in his New Party platform. In *The Case for the New Party*, its author, C. E. M. Joad, devoted an entire section to the pressing need for “The Control of Science.” Science, he suggested, would remain

³¹ “The Meaning of New Britain: Tracts of the New Order” New Party Release, 1931, p.6, British Union Collection, University of Sheffield.

³² Ibid., p. 1-7.

an untamed beast until the free market system that allowed it free reign was ended. It was essential, said Joad

to control the blind results of science itself. Science has forged for man's service a mighty weapon for use against the forces of nature, but like all weapons it is two edged. It may be used for man's weal or his woe. For science, it is clear, does not change a man's desires; it merely makes it easier for him to realize the desires he already has. If these desires are dangerous to the welfare of the community, this added power of realization only serves to increase the danger... We must control productive processes in the public interest and see that the application of science to industry, which if properly managed, should increase man's wealth and diminish his labor, does not diminish wealth and abolish labor... It is precisely such a policy of scientific control which includes the control of science itself, that is advocated by the New Party... We must then put an end to the anarchy of laissez-faire industry and insist that industry should be carried on as a public service.³³

This should certainly not be taken as anti-scientific, but as a call for the rationalization and state direction of scientific and technological innovation. Modernizing Britain's industrial complex was a top priority of the New Party, and its authors shook their heads at the nation's failure to modernize effectively. On the frontispiece of New Party Broadcast No. 7, *The New Party and the Old Toryism*, W. E. D. Allen, included the following quote from a visiting Frenchman about British factories: "One still finds machines for which the proper use is a science museum. These machines are obsolete – almost useless, but they are kept because in England they like to preserve everything." This was the mentality that the New Party hoped to blast away.

Allen, an Irish M.P. elected in 1929, was one of Mosley's New Party inner-circle. He ran an advertising business back in Ireland with his two brothers and would use the income he derived from it to support Mosley's parties from behind the scenes in the years to come. Having defected to join Mosley in 1931, he chose not to pursue candidacy that year and so lost his seat. In terms of New Party rhetoric, though, Allen was a passionate writer and an abrasive critic of the "old gang" politicians he hoped the New Party (and later fascism) could sweep away.

³³ C. E. M. Joad, New Party Broadcast No. 1, "The Case for the New Party," 1931, p. 11.

Writing an introduction to New Party principles in 1931, he produced a manifesto for New Party modernism entitled, “We Oppose the Old Men.” His points about the place of science and technology in the “new era” are unmistakable; in a new technical age, the old model politicians were ready for the scrapheap.

It is the tragedy of our period that on the whole the ‘old men’ and the ‘young men’ of today think in different languages, believe in different things. We have no respect for grey hairs, grey theories, methods and traditions... We mean to make the future and *not to save the past*... Ours is a world of aeroplanes, wireless, talkies, speed boats, of all things new and wonderful. They are our life. We love them. They do not make us pause. We go through the world in a crash helmet, not in a top hat. We are the children of a new age, born out of lightning, blood and noise. We are the clean phoenix that arises out of the ruins of a world that wrecked itself. Therefore we oppose the old men. We will have no more of them – their smug traditions, their rigid, empty principles, their hard morality, their myopic satisfaction with things we know to be against the light.³⁴

The general election of 1931 produced the National Government, which continued the economic stringency of the Labour Government and gradually shifted power into the hands of the Conservatives. And it had been a disaster for the young New Party. Not a single New Party candidate won a seat in parliament, including Mosley, who lost the seat he had held since 1919. With time on his hands, he took a lengthy tour of the Empire and traveled in Europe. He made two visits to Rome specifically to meet Mussolini and observe for himself the operations of the Fascist state. He enjoyed lavish treatment there, touring the famous Pontine Marshes, seeing the modernized transit systems, and Mussolini even allowed him to stand on the podium for ceremonial marches. He was deeply affected by his experiences there and his political beliefs, which were already tending towards fascism, moved fully in that direction. Mosley came away believing he had seen a truly “modern state” and in Mussolini the “first emergence of the modern

³⁴ W. E. D. Allen, “We Oppose the Old Men,” undated clipping from Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham, B/3/4.

man to power.”³⁵ Upon his return to Britain, Mosley refashioned his party as a fascist organization and renamed it the British Union of Fascists. The party was highly imitative of the Italian regime. Mosley even adopted the bound bundle of fasces as the party’s emblem (later changed to a lightning flash within a circle), and began to assemble a group of “blackshirts,” trained in “self-defense” to keep order at party meetings. He also went to work on a book that would outline his political philosophy and define a concrete policy on a number of crucial issues. This book, The Greater Britain was published in 1932 and remained the BUF’s principal policy manifesto throughout its existence. Even so, Mosley and other party notables would produce several books and party pamphlets that collectively formed the party agenda. The BUF program has been quite thoroughly documented by historians and there is no need here to rehash it in detail. Still, some of its most important principles must be reviewed to emphasize their fundamental relationship to technological modernity.

First, like virtually all fascist parties, the BUF advocated a single party state led by a single “Leader,” who embodied the spirit of the nation and the will of the people. Mosley always claimed that the Leader would be placed into power by a national election and could be removed by the same means. Whether this would have actually been a possibility had Mosley gained power is highly questionable. The regimes of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco make this likelihood seem very remote indeed. For Mosley, fascism was, to use his words, “the Modern Movement.” A dictatorship was necessary to meet the new challenges of the twentieth century, while liberal democracy had taken shape out of the challenges and events of the previous century. As he said, “We have tragic proof that economic life has outgrown our political institutions. Britain has failed to recover from the war period; and this result, however complicated by special causes, is

³⁵ Oswald Mosley, “A Visit to Mussolini,” *Daily Mail*, quoted in Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 285.

largely due to a system of Government designed by and for, the nineteenth century.” What had changed the world’s circumstances so dramatically was the rapid advance of science and technology. On the opening page of The Greater Britain he began

Our political system dates substantially from 1832. The intervening century has seen the invention and development of the telegraph, telephone and wireless. At the beginning of the period, railways were a novelty, and a journey of a dozen miles was a serious undertaking. Since then, railway transport has risen and prospered only to yield place to the still greater revolution of motor transport on modern roads. The whole question of power production is less than a century old, and electricity is a recent development. The modern processes of mass production and rationalization date only from the War period. Within the last century science has multiplied by many times the power of man to produce...From the standpoint of a century ago all these changes are revolutionary. The sphere of government has widened and the complications of government have increased. It is hardly surprising that the political system of 1832 is wholly out of date today.³⁶

This notion was not lost on the party’s early supporters. Lord Rothermere, Britain’s most powerful press lord and the nation’s second richest man, was a keen admirer of fascism abroad and of Mosley’s movement. In 1933 and early 1934 Rothermere extended his support to Mosley through business deals and through official endorsement by his newspaper *The Daily Mail*. Rothermere printed a full page editorial titled, “Hurrah for the Blackshirts!,” in which he praised Mosley’s policies and the energy and commitment of BUF members. In that editorial he echoed the BUF agenda for scrapping the obsolete (liberal democracy) and replacing it with a newer model (fascism). Rothermere wrote that the

Blackshirts proclaim a fact which politicians dating from pre-war days will never face – that the new age requires new methods, and new men. They base their contention on the simple truth that parliamentary government is conducted on the same lines as it was in the eighteenth century, though the conditions with which it deals have altered beyond recognition. They want to bring our national administration up to date...We must keep up with the spirit of the age. That spirit is one of national discipline and organization.³⁷

³⁶ Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain, (London: BUF Press, 1934) [1932], p. 17-18.

³⁷ Lord Rothermere, “Hurrah for the Blackshirts” *Daily Mail*, January 15, 1934, p. 15.

Feedback from the public showed that the message of modernity gained some purchase among readers. One letter replying to Rotheremere's article, written by one Alex H. Bartlett, read: "Sir—I was very pleased to read Lord Rotheremere's article on the Blackshirt movement in Great Britain. He hit the nail exactly on the head: Modern conditions demand modern methods of government and if our country is to survive and prosper we must scrap our elderly legislators and give the younger men their chance."³⁸ Some ordinary observers, it seems, recognized the modernist character of the BUF message.

In academic terms, Mosley believed in a "technological determinism," or the tendency of science and technology to advance on its own power, regulated only by its own set of natural laws. Science had the power to determine events and impact lives, and those not technically trained or involved in the scientific project were essentially powerless to influence its trajectory. And in the early twentieth century, said Mosley, "scientific advance has been more sudden and disconcerting than ever before in history."³⁹ But, Mosley was also convinced that the march of science and technology did not have to continue without regard for those whom it trampled upon or left behind. His overriding concern was finding a new political system that could control the

³⁸ Alex H. Bartlett, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Mail*, January 17, 1934, p. 10. Late 1933 and early 1934 represented the peak of popularity for the BUF, thanks in great part to Rotheremere's public endorsement. Rotheremere withdrew that official support in the summer of 1934 and the specific reason for this remains controversial. Mosley wrote that Rotheremere told him Jewish advertisers were going to boycott the *Daily Mail* unless he abandoned his support of the BUF. Other reasons may include the violence at the Olympia meeting that summer and the distaste it generated among the British public. Further, Hitler's "Night of the long knives," had taken place in June and may have made Rotheremere think twice about his open support of fascism. Although, it must be said, his paper continued to report on Germany in glowing terms for years to come. Whatever the precise reason or combination of reasons, Rotheremere's withdrawal of support sent the BUF into a rapid decline. The BUF would struggle greatly until 1938 when its membership started to increase again, attracted to its radical anti-war campaign.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

development of science through strong policy and channel its power directly into the overall national welfare. Far from any wish to slow down the advance of science or to reduce its role in the political nation, he announced

Science must be the *basis* of the technical state of Fascism. In the modern world the function of the State is largely to keep the ring clear for the technician. The money spent on both scientific and technical research is absurdly inadequate. With a more far-sighted policy, not only could industrial discovery one hundred-fold replace the money expended, but many of the ravages of disease might be conquered. Democracy is always penny-wise and pound foolish. Fascism, not only by money but by honour, will repose its faith in the scientist.⁴⁰

Mosley and the BUF would begin the process of modernizing the nation's system of government by instituting a modified parliamentary system. The House of Commons, as had been the object of the IFL and the New Party, would be refashioned into a body based upon industrial function—essentially the Italian corporatist model. Rather than a separate chamber for corporations, however, as Mussolini had created, Mosley advocated that the Commons itself be organized by industry. MP's would be technical elites and would be elected by those in their particular industries. For A. Raven Thomson, the BUF's chief theorist and a member of the party executive, reorganization along corporatist lines meant the ultimate rationalization of government. While industry had made tremendous strides in rationalizing itself, the state had lagged behind. But, with the advent of the Corporate State

A rationalized expression of opinion will be realized in keeping with the modern age. For the first time all members of every industry will have their share in the control of the great economic factors of their daily life. By electing trustworthy representatives they will choose not some vague general Party policy – to be conveniently forgotten by politicians in office – but will determine in common with the other factors of production the conditions of their daily work, the remuneration for their service and the planning and regulation of their own trade or profession.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Oswald Mosley, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered. (London: BUF Press, 1935), p. 8.

⁴¹ A. Raven Thomson, The Coming Corporate State. (London: BUF, 1934), p. 9.

This repeated emphasis on rationalization was echoed by Mosley. He maintained that attempting to curtail the continuing rationalization of industry was futile. Industry would continue to move forward with ever increasing efficiency into the future. The challenge was to find a formula for government rationalization which could then compliment and direct modern industry. In his comments on the subject, Mosley reiterated his belief in the folly of trying to turn back the march of scientific progress.

Nothing but the rationalized state can hope to overcome the problem created by rationalized industry. It is idle to denounce rationalization, because it simply means the modernization of industry, and industries which are not modernized cannot live at all in present conditions. Further, to prevent rationalization is to prevent any reaping of the fruits of science which, in any rationalized society would vastly benefit mankind. The way to meet industrial rationalization is not to put back the hands of the clock, but so to organize society that its effects are constructive rather than destructive.⁴²

In fact, Mosley indicated that “rationalized” corporatism was the central objective of all the “modern movements.” “The main object of a modern and Fascist movement is to establish the Corporate State,” said Mosley. In that system, representatives of business, science, government and labor would theoretically work in concert to manage production, distribution, mechanization, employment, and wages. Class conflict would dissolve and the home market would have the resources (through higher wage levels) to consume all the output that science had empowered industry to produce. The corporations of parliament would then report to a larger National Corporation (under a Minister of Corporations) that would provide direction as to the overriding priorities of the nation and settle disputes. (See Fig. 2 for the full projected BUF corporate organization).

⁴² Mosley, The Greater Britain, p. 67.

In addition to the other advantages British fascists saw in corporatism, that system inherently placed scientists and technical experts in positions of power. Mosley was adamant about bringing technicians into government. The “old gang,” he said, were supremely unqualified in the area of science and technology. The party system produced experts in debate, coalition building and party positioning. As to the actual working of production and consumption they were woefully ignorant. Additionally, said Mosley, “the increasingly technical nature of all problems in an economic age has made it difficult or impossible to explain the real issues to the electorate as a whole.”⁴³ So a Government of men unqualified to understand the real issues of the day was doubly powerless to explain those issues to the voters. Those voters then elected officials without an adequate understanding of the actual issues that faced the nation. This was not the case with the corporate system. As the BUF envisioned it, the Corporate State was nearly a pure technocracy. Those who voted for parliamentary candidates would do so based upon issues about which they were experts; MP’s would run for office based upon surpassing technical expertise; those technical elites in parliament then would legislate only within those areas where they were supremely qualified. As Mosley wrote,

By such a system as we advocate, the technician, who is the architect of our industrial future, is freed for his task. He is given the mandate for that task by the informed franchise of his colleagues in his own industry. A vote so cast will be the result of experience and information. *Is not this in fact the rationalized state?* Is not this system preferable to the solemn humbug of present elections, which assumes that the most technical problems of modern government, ranging from currency management to the evolution of a scientific protective system, can be settled by a few days’ loose discussion in the turmoil of a General Election?

In this corporate technocracy, finance capital would have diminished power. After “old gang politicians,” the most frequent target of extreme right rhetoric was “international finance.” City speculators, said fascists, invested solely on the basis of their own gain and therefore, under

⁴³ Ibid., p. 46.

democracy innovators and producers were at the mercy of capitalists who had no interest in the national welfare. “International finance” was very often seen by the extreme right as being dominated by Jews who worked for their own personal benefit or the benefit of the Jewish community—often at the expense of the general good. But, in the BUF’s vision of a fascist corporate state, the producer rather than the financier would be “the basis of the nation.” As Mosley wrote,

the producer, whether by hand or brain or capital, will be the basis of the nation. The forces which assist him in his work of rebuilding the nation will be encouraged; the forces which thwart and destroy productive enterprise will be met with the force of national authority. The incalculable powers of finance will be harnessed in the service of national production. They will not be fettered in their daily work; but they will be guided into the channels which serve the nation’s ends. This is the true function of finance, intended as Sir Basil Blackett has insisted, to be “the handmaid of industry.” There will be no room, in our financial organization, for the unorganized operations which have led to such enormous complexities and have rocked the structure of British industry to its foundations.⁴⁴

This emphasis on the encouragement of the producer attracted many to the BUF. As we shall see in the following chapter a great number of important inventors, engineers, and industrialists supported or even joined Mosley’s movement. The BUF and the extreme right more generally were conspicuously “productivist” in their sympathies. Their rhetoric concerning the importance of technology and industry often broke along the lines described by Jeffrey Herf in his analysis of the “Reactionary Modernism” developed in Germany. Herf identified Nazi and proto-Nazi authors who defined several juxtapositions which helped shape Nazi ideology: production vs. circulation, iron vs. gold, blood vs. intellect, Aryan vs. Jew.⁴⁵ Much the same productivist ethos pervaded British fascist thinking.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁵ See Jeffrey Herf, Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Producers would have inherent power given that productive industry would supply the representatives in parliament and determine basic political issues. The actual inventor, though, would need special consideration. A. Raven Thomson included an entire chapter in his book The Coming Corporate State on “Protecting the Inventor.” First of all, said Thomson, the inventor had hitherto been neglected or hindered at every turn in twentieth century Britain. The technical visionaries were often ignored, patronized or even laughed at by those who lacked the intellectual equipment to share their vision. At the mercy of private capital, inventors often saw their ideas wither and die because of lack of funding. “British inventors,” he said, “have been scandalously treated under the present industrial and financial system. It is notorious that in many cases they have been driven abroad, because of the impossibility of getting adequate financial support at home.”⁴⁶ Often, the very personality of the inventor was not compatible with the necessities of courting the City or challenging large companies.

The result is that the unfortunate inventor is at the mercy of the private financier or the industrial combine. As, notoriously, inventors are both poor and unbusinesslike, they are incapable of coping with the wiles of either one or the other. In many cases they find themselves with a splendid idea, which they can exhibit through a working model, but without the means of carrying out the experiments on a large scale which are necessary to make the invention a practical proposition... Through patent agents, etc. he must seek to interest some private financier in his idea, who will undertake to finance the necessary experiments. This financier has the inventor in the hollow of his hand and can strike the most unfair bargain with him. Some of the greatest inventions have brought their inventors practically nothing.⁴⁷

A BUF Government, said Thomson, would create a Board of Scientific Research, made up of trained scientists and associated with the National Patent Office, which would assess new ideas and determine their potential. An Investment Board would then review the reports of promising

⁴⁶ Thomson, The Coming Corporate State, p. 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

new projects and secure the funds “to the point where a public company could be floated to bring the new patent on to the market.” Thus a new inventor with an idea that was approved by the Board “would receive direct assistance at a much earlier stage than he does today and would no longer be at the mercy of the financier.” The inventor would be free to pursue private funds if the Board of Scientific Research did not report favorably on his invention. Further, a Fascist Government, said Thomson, would never “permit the purchase of valuable patents by vested interests and their entire suppression.” Finally, Thomson acknowledged the dark side of innovation – that some inventions could be “of such revolutionary nature that they endanger the stability of a whole industry and the livelihood of many thousands of people.” These innovations, however, would not be suppressed. Instead, “the Investment Board would arrange for its gradual and planned introduction in consultation with the corporation controlling the industry concerned, to enable the advantages to be realized with the least possible disturbance of industrial life.”⁴⁸ The very specific way in which the BUF party publications addressed productive industry and innovation made it popular within that community. As with manufacturing elites, several technical pioneers aligned themselves with the BUF or the extreme right. As we shall see, the frustrated technological visionary will emerge as a recognizable type among the fascists and pro-fascists of Britain.

BUF scientific policy also extended to a thorough plan for medical care. First, the BUF policy was to continue the private voluntary hospital system that existed throughout Britain. But, the state would also create nationally owned and operated hospitals. Private hospitals would also fall under the direction of the national system. Mosley wrote in Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered (1935) “we see no reason for the abolition of the voluntary system. We would,

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

however, appoint a National Director of Hospitals to coordinate the working of all hospitals (both voluntary and state), who would be represented by nominees on the governing committees of all voluntary hospitals. The State, while making it its duty to find the necessary additional funds for the efficient management of voluntary hospitals, would not interfere with their internal management.”⁴⁹ At the center of the policy, however, the BUF advocated a state operated and state regulated system. This transfer of power from private hands to public, included boards which would control the status of medical professionals. These boards would rigorously control the awarding of the “specialist” status to physicians.

Mosley also vigorously supported the government itself sponsoring scientific research. He indicated that the existing government department would continue, but it had to be supported by technical experts and the apparatus of the corporate state in order to bring meaningful benefits. He complained that the existing apparatus in Britain produced only anemic results. “A Department of Scientific Research already exists,” he wrote, “but its scope is limited and its funds are exiguous...The great possibilities of science are not deemed worthy of proper support in this curious muddle of Old Gang politics.”⁵⁰ Government had to have technically trained and aware officials to channel scientific progress, protect the inventor, and to protect the ordinary taxpayer as well. As he wrote:

Far more powerful machinery of government must be created, not only for the purpose of scientific research and the fostering of invention, but also for the carrying through of new inventions from the proved experiment to the point where public support may be sought. Millions of public money have been wasted in recent years through dubious companies floating doubtful inventions on the Stock Exchange and fleecing an ignorant public unprotected by the examination and safeguards of Government. The public must be

⁴⁹ Mosley, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Mosley, The Greater Britain, p. 168.

protected, and the resources thus wasted must be mobilized for the genuine work of industrial reconstruction.⁵¹

Finally, the BUF explored another area of modernity through a less obvious group of technologies. Mosley's party enthusiastically embraced the strategies exploiting personal celebrity in their promotion of Mosley as charismatic Leader. Julie Gottlieb has addressed this in her study of the BUF's embrace of merchandising and publicity as part of its political culture. Her article, "The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists," dissects this highly modern aspect of the BUF, further undermining the view that fascism (British or generic) was predominantly reactionary. Gottlieb looks specifically at Mosley's use of modern marketing techniques as early as his 1931 New Party campaign. Among the promotional efforts, for instance, was the creation of a New Party promotional film with Mosley depicted as glamorous rebel. This would continue and intensify in the BUF and, as Gottlieb says, "it is worthwhile to observe already in the New Party this curious conflation of politics and entertainment and especially the attempt to harness the latest media technologies to accompany its new vision of politics."⁵² Gottlieb goes on to recognize the BUF's use of film, loudspeaker equipment, symbols and iconography—even an in-house photo agency to glamorize Mosley and the BUF in the mode of modern film stars. These promotional materials took advantage of "Mosley's celebrity status and marketability as the sex symbol of British politics," and this image was "institutionalized and commodified." Using the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁵² Julie V. Gottlieb, "The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technologies in the British Union of Fascists," *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 41(1), 2006, p. 38.

“language, symbols and tropes of the cinema,” says Gottlieb, Mosley’s image developed into the great “anti-hero in the grand epic of interwar politics.”⁵³

In addition to photo books, the BUF also produced badges, banners, flags, and even at one point began manufacturing its own brand of cigarettes. The cigarette venture was bankrolled by Lord Rothermere who, because of his sympathies with the group, expressed his “intention to give my yearly dividends from the manufacture of the Blackshirt brand to the Blackshirt movement.”⁵⁴ The idea of the “brand” is an important one, and Gottlieb recognizes the presence of this very modern marketing principle across all BUF promotional activity. The party’s mass meetings, colorful banners, glamorous portraits, and cigarette packages were “organized to launch and promote the *Blackshirt brand*, the particularly virile brand whose trademark was Mosley as matinee idol.”⁵⁵

The “Back to the Soil” Movement and the Anti-Modern in Context

For those scholars who have emphasized the anti-modern aspects of Britain’s extreme right there is certainly evidence. Likewise, for those who have emphasized the irreconcilable contradiction of the modern vs. anti-modern in fascism, there is a volume of discourse from which to build an argument. This section, again, will not argue against the existence of this tension in British fascist discourse. It will, however, seek to demonstrate that the protests against technology and the hope for a return to pastoralism represent a minority strain. The section will begin by looking at some examples of anti-modernist ideas, but then point to a broader context. Many of these nostalgic quotations appear within larger works whose central messages are

⁵³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁴ Letter from Rothermere to Mosley, May 2, 1934, Mosley Papers OMN/B/7/2/7.

⁵⁵ Gottlieb, “The Marketing of Megalomania,” , p. 54.



Sir Oswald Mosley from the BUF Portrait Book – “The anti-hero of British interwar Politics.”

unmistakably focused upon rationalism and technological modernity. Then we shall examine one of the most seemingly anti-modern movements of the day, the British campaign for a return to agriculture, or the “back to the soil” movement. Upon closer examination, this emphasis on rebuilding Britain’s agricultural foundation had quite modern characteristics and sought to reinsert agriculture into a more balanced British future.

In terms of British fascist anti-modernity, some of the most common references in BUF writing were those celebrating the glories of the Elizabethan age. Both Skidelsky and Linehan mention this and these kinds of statements do exist. But, these generally appear as asides or sidelong glances at Britain’s history in the midst of articles or books that emphasize the creation of a new modernity based on scientific progress. A good example of this occurs in the writing of A. Raven Thomson. His most important publication was his book The Coming Corporate State, mentioned above. He ends that work with the following message:

This, however, at least we may say, that the Medieval people who lived in hovels and built cathedrals were nearer to a realization of the divine purpose than we are today; that the Tudor Period, the high point of our own national life, found its expression, not only in the seafaring and Empire building of Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake, but in the philosophy and science of Francis Bacon and the poetry and drama of William Shakespeare. It will be in recovering the “age of faith” of Christendom and the vital energy of Tudor England that we may realize in part the great future of our nation.⁵⁶

It is important to recognize here, that this is merely one paragraph in a lengthy work that focuses entirely upon the reorganization of British science and heavy industries. Thomson’s overwhelming concern is the introduction of corporatism and explaining its benefits, while demonstrating that technology and innovation will not just continue under this system, but expand. His reference to “Merrie England” is tucked away in the last paragraph of the last page of the book.

⁵⁶ Thomson, The Coming Corporate State, p. 48.

Similarly, in Linehan's "The City, the Countryside and the Machine," the author quotes Thomson and one of the most prolific British fascist writers, J. F. C. Fuller, to make his case. He asserts

If fascists' attitudes towards the metropolis were characterized by unease, anxiety and even loathing, that other potent symbol of modernity, the *machine*, aroused similar emotions in them, emotions which, *prima facie*, strike one as a further example of a reactionary anti-modernist outlook. Apprehension about the machine and the machine age was *prevalent* in British fascist discourse.⁵⁷

While there was certainly an element of longing for a simpler life, and even a strong romantic current running through the writing of the literary community that supported the BUF, this author cannot agree with the assertion that hostility to the machine was prevalent in British fascist discourse. The writing and careers of men like Thomson and Fuller were mostly dedicated to the *promotion* of technological modernism. While they may have had strong feelings about the blights caused by communism and democracy mismanaging modernity, the overwhelming message of their political careers was focused on technological progress. Thomson was the leading promoter of corporatism in the BUF and Fuller was the extreme right's most ubiquitous proponent of military mechanization. We shall investigate his career and writing more fully in a subsequent chapter discussing the extreme right's obsession with modernizing defense.

As with the machine, Linehan similarly sees British fascist attitudes toward urbanization as predominantly negative. As he says,

It is tempting to view the BUF's critique of the modern city and its progeny, the residential suburbs, as a quintessential expression of reactionary fascist anti-modernism. Indeed, rarely does one encounter a positive view of the city or the suburbs in Mosleyite literature... This romantic vision of a sturdy and contented yeoman farming population

⁵⁷ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, p.257, (Italics mine).

and an autarkical return to agricultural production was genuine and can only be interpreted as unambiguously anti-modern.⁵⁸

Linehan is closer to the mark when he recognizes that despite this strand of fascist discourse, “On closer examination...the nature of the BUF’s urban project appear to be less unambiguously anti-modern.”⁵⁹ Indeed published BUF policy on dealing with urban blight carries with it the language and ideas of *ultra*-modernity. The policy outlines the program of slum clearance in a phased and highly rationalized process and emphasizes that the methods of modern production could be applied. Interestingly this housing plan was included in the BUFs campaign pamphlet on its medical policy, driving home the point that slums undermined the health of the nation.

Fascism would make the slum clearance problem a national task in the following manner; we would formulate our programme for clearing the slums and rebuilding over a period of three years. The slums of each of the great cities would be divided into sections to be gutted and rebuilt over the specified period. Outside the city we would erect temporary bungalows to house the inhabitants of Section No. 1 while the slum was being pulled down and rebuilt. We would also provide a State transport service to carry them to and from their work. When No. 1 section was completed, the inhabitants would vacate their bungalows and go back to their new houses. The inhabitants of No. 2 section would then vacate their houses and would go to the bungalows and use the new transport system. When their houses were completed No. 3 section would take over the bungalows...and so on until the gutting and rebuilding of the slums had been completed. *Once the problem is taken as a national problem, it can be organized on the grand scale and every principle of modern organization and of mass production can be employed.*⁶⁰

Clearly it was not the principles of modernity themselves that were to blame for the industrial slums, but, in the BUF view, the uncoordinated and ad hoc approach that had supposedly prevailed under democracy.

As one examines the references to Britain’s traditions and the celebration of the Elizabethan past, as small parts of larger and more modern writing, one may even get the sense that these are

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 255, 257.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 255.

⁶⁰ *BUF Medical Policy*, p. 5. British Union Collection, Sheffield.

rather forced additions. It is possible that the BUF eventually recognized that more mainstream British society did not respond well to such starkly modernist propositions. While this will be difficult to prove conclusively, there is a document that suggests the possibility. After the summer of 1934, when Rothermere had withdrawn his official support and the party began a sharp decline, Mosley called upon an outside consultant. That consultant was the military analyst, retired Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, mentioned earlier. Fuller conducted a full appraisal of the party including its management structure, which would contribute to Mosley's subsequent reorganization of the party. In that private report Fuller remarked on the strident modernism of the party's street presence and its threatening nature to ordinary Britons. The youth and uniformity of the blackshirts (with their regimented marches and black uniforms suggesting the human equivalent of mass production), grated against more tradition-bound British sensibilities.

Though the wearing of the black shirt appeals to the young people, it must not be overlooked that this is an old country, very solid and stable and matter of fact. It is still instinctively a feudal country. The masses of the people will always listen to men and women of experience and importance, but they will seldom listen to boys and girls...Most of the blackshirts are too young to realize this...They consider that those who do not agree with them are old-fashioned or lacking in energy. In a revolutionary country they would be right, but in a conservative country they are wrong.⁶¹

Mosley heeded much of Fuller's advice in terms of reducing the party's bureaucracy and it is thus reasonable to surmise that Mosley would have given consideration to Fuller's suggestions as to the conservative nature of the voting public. It is quite possible, though again difficult to prove, that Mosley and his writers may have deliberately tempered their ultra-modern language and included references to Britain's history and traditions, though the party's policies remained unchanged. It is even more probable that references to the Elizabethan age were meant to refer

⁶¹ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on the BUF" 1935, Oswald Mosley Papers, OMN/B/7/4/2.

back to another time of national crisis when a single national leader, Elizabeth, rallied the nation against foreign threats.

This brings us to the “back to the soil” movement which found regular voice on the extreme right. As part of his analysis of that movement Stone has investigated a wide spectrum of organizations attempting to get beyond the British Union of Fascists. This is a sound approach, and one that will be taken in this work in the following chapters. But, Stone perhaps puts too much emphasis upon groups like the English Mystery and its writers. While the English Mystery has generally been acknowledged as an extreme right organization and was certainly highly nationalist, it lacked the radicalism of an extreme viewpoint. The anti-modern notions that one finds among the publications of the English Mystery include distaste for large industry and repulsion at large chain stores. This dovetailed with their milder, but clear, expressions of anti-Semitism. One can also find plenty of examples of enthusiasm for agricultural values and a love of the countryside. But, this group was far more conservative than it was extreme. In the *Recorders' Quarterly Guide for Members of the English Mystery*, for example, the Introduction outlines the objectives and methods of the group.

The English Mystery is a quest for good manners, a search for the ways of restoring our liberties and culture, and of achieving national ends by *personal* effort. To harp on wars and world problems and the endless follies of our rulers merely leads to impotent depression of spirit over the things we can NOT affect, and the consequent neglect of those we can...Manners are tested ways of behavior and it is our business to find out by enquiry and doctrine, by imagination and discipline, what English manners were and still should be.⁶²

It is difficult to see the pursuit of old English manners and traditions as an expression of extreme politics. In fact, this passage emphasizes the group's eventual aversion to political matters altogether. The group's anti-modern stances, then, which certainly did exist, seem misplaced in

⁶² *The Recorders' Quarterly Guide for Members of the English Mystery*, March, 1937, p. 1.

assessing the ideology of the extreme right wing or “organo-fascism,” and better suited to understanding the most traditional aspects of Tory conservatism.

In fact, British fascist enthusiasm for redeveloping agriculture does not express itself as a rejection of modernity at all. First of all, the conversion of land for agricultural purposes was not seen as a step backward, but another step toward developmental progress. The work done in Italy, for instance, in draining the Pontine Marshes or converting swampland into farmland, was seen as wresting progress from the clutches of the primeval. Mosley wrote about his visit to the Italian countryside, “The change in housing conditions of the people makes the old Italy unrecognizable. The primitive hut is replaced by the modern and scientific farm buildings; the great marshes which partially encircled Rome have been drained and converted into rich and productive soil... Without Fascism these advancements were unthinkable.”⁶³ We can hear the same spirit of progress from Francis Yeats-Brown, a former airman, January Club member and fervent admirer of Mussolini.

Since those far off days the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes was often considered and sometimes attempted. Julius Caesar might have succeeded in carrying out the vast labors necessary, had not the dagger of Brutus crossed his plans; after him no Pope or Emperor had the strength for the task, until Mussolini. Napoleon’s engineers attempted the task, but failed. And now, where buffaloes used to wallow, corn is growing... 150,000 acres won from the waste of Nature, now full of fertile crops, and inhabited by 3,000 sturdy peasant families.⁶⁴

British fascists were determined to see their own nation’s agriculture revitalized as well. This priority was based on their world view which saw the human race in a chaotic struggle and the danger of war as ever-present. Virtually all British fascists fervently wished to convert to a closed economic system and to reconstruct the nation as a self sufficient state in all its vital

⁶³ Oswald Mosley, “A World Reborn under Fascism,” *Daily Mail*, May 1, 1933, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Francis Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1939), p. 102.

resources and production. Without a thriving agriculture, which had declined seriously relative to industry, Britain was vulnerable to starvation at the whim of other trading nations or in time of war. With no trust in other nations, and as the world system appeared to be collapsing around them, fascists were adamant about rebuilding an agricultural base that would keep Britain safely fed in times of crisis. But, this urge to redevelop agriculture was not anti-modernist. In fact, fascist policies surrounding agriculture emphasized the need for the most modern and scientific methods to be exploited in order to maximize agricultural production. And that production would *have* to be maximized for Britain to reach self-sufficiency before any impending disaster. State controlled science and technology again would provide the means for meeting this challenge.

The call for a modernized agriculture can first be heard from Leese's Imperial Fascist League. In one of the party's earliest policy publications, agricultural development is presented as the first priority of the nation. This pamphlet, *Agriculture Comes First* contained an important section about the need for bringing farming up-to-date:

Owing to the immense recent progress in agricultural method, by which we are now able to a very great extent to defeat the British weather, we believe the time has come to put the land to its full use in food production for the nation...*Mechanized* methods must bring the land back under cultivation...In the South and Southwest of England, mechanized corn growing with artificial manureing will be pushed to its utmost.⁶⁵

This modernizing spirit also showed itself among the extreme right pro-fascists who were not part of an explicitly fascist party. An article in the pro-fascist *Saturday Review* appeared in 1933 titled, "The Machine and the Farmer." It is entirely consistent with fascist ideas about the necessity of revitalized agriculture and the possibilities for achieving this through science.

⁶⁵ Arnold Leese, *Agriculture Comes First: The Imperial Fascist League's Agricultural Policy*, No Date, F. T. Cooper Collection, 181/1/26/AGR.

We are now in a period of rapid evolution from an agriculture whose practices were founded on hand labour and the use of animals as the sources of power and fertility, to an agriculture employing mechanical power, machinery, and chemical manures. This new agriculture is on a different basis from the old and has greater possibilities. A man with a tractor can plough more in an hour than before he could in a day...Not only are the old operations speeded up, but new ones are possible. The combine harvester, which has revolutionized grain growing overseas, is being used successfully in England and Scotland.⁶⁶

The more quickly British farmers shifted to the “new agriculture” and embraced the “Promise of Science” the quicker Britain could regain its security. No longer could it be said that “we must import the bulk of our food or starve.”⁶⁷

Mosley’s New Party was similar in its push to employ the most modern methods for farming. In the New Party’s policies, farmers would have their own self regulating guild, similar to the fascist corporation, and be assured “adequate machinery for conserving the land and ensuring its full utilization.” But it was the BUF which made agricultural redevelopment one of its most urgent areas of policy. This had its political reasons as well as ideological ones. Mosley understood that Britain’s farmers were an unhappy constituency ready to listen to new solutions that included state protection and subsidy. Agriculture would have its own corporation in the fascist state and would enjoy protection from foreign competition not from tariffs, but through outright exclusion of foodstuffs from outside the Empire. Further, fascist theory believed that through the corporation, the inefficiencies and waste of the unplanned system would be eliminated. A new national system of agriculture, Mosley insisted, would take a much more rational approach.

At present, owing to the complete lack of co-operation, gluts of fruits and vegetables occur very frequently owing to each farmer laying down what he thinks fit of each variety of produce. The Farming Corporation would make it its first duty to collect

⁶⁶ J. E. Newman, “The Machine and the Farmer,” *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1933, p. 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

statistics of production and issue advice as to the amounts of different varieties to be produced requisite to prevent both scarcity and glut. The Corporation would also determine rents and wages in accordance with the prosperity of the industry, and prevent disputes arising between the various factors of agricultural production.⁶⁸

BUF policy also advocated a large corps of unemployed laborers called a “Land Army” to begin the process of land reclamation and development for agriculture. This was part of Mosley’s Keynesian plan to begin the fascist recovery through public works programs. Mosley also said he would stamp out older traditions in order to free the farmer for more productive work. This included the old church tax that farmers still paid. As he said, “Whatever their justification in the Middle Ages, at the time of their first institution, tithes have become today a complete anachronism.”⁶⁹

The most modernizing aspect of the BUF agricultural policy, however, was its emphasis upon continuing scientific research and technical development. The BUF proposed to institutionalize agricultural research at the state level to keep its development well funded, and firmly controlled.

The BUF statement on Agricultural Research says

A further function of the Farming Corporation will be to maintain agricultural research stations which will give free advice to farmers throughout the country in the modern technique of agriculture, and equip training centres where members of the agricultural industry can undergo courses of instruction. The advance of agriculture is so important for the welfare of the community, and the technical problems involved of such complexity, that Fascism regards such technical colleges as a necessity. Indeed a Fascist Government would not begrudge a generous subsidy to place the resources of modern scientific research at the disposal of British agriculture.⁷⁰

The BUF press regularly ran features as well on the newest research breakthroughs and facilities that offered the promise of new thresholds of production. In *Fascist Quarterly*, for instance, H.

⁶⁸ *Fascism and Agriculture*, No Date.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

E. Crocker wrote an article about his tour of the agricultural research farm at Rothamsted with its innovations in the use of crop refuse and especially its improvements in artificial fertilizers.

These fertilizers would be vital to the nation's agricultural effort and, according to Crocker, fascist government was needed to get them into the hands of farmers.

Experiments at Rothamsted and Woburn prove beyond question the immense importance of artificial fertilizers if the soil is to produce its highest possible yield. Nitrogen, phosphates and potash all play their part in soil fertilization, used and combined in accordance with soil and climatic conditions...Farmers realize the importance of artificials, but they also know full well the cost of them, and in many instances do not consider it worth their while to use them when they have the greatest difficulty in disposing of their crops at a price which will give him a fair profit...This opens up an important aspect of the case, and it is obviously essential that farmers should be able to buy the requisite artificial at a cheap price...It is only under a Fascist Government where supply and price will be regulated that full use can be made of artificials, and this question will be one of the first and the most important to be dealt with by the Agricultural Corporation.⁷¹

This enthusiasm for artificial fertilizers was contradicted by one of the most prominent of the BUF agriculturalists, Jorian Jenks. Jenks advocated a return to the soil and a de-emphasis on chemicals and fertilizers. He was an early advocate of "organic farming," and was a leader in the Soil Association and the editor of its journal. "Just as fascists repudiated mainstream politics as stultifying, ossifying, and degenerative, so organicist farmers in the epoch of fascism reviled mainstream farming methods for 'killing the soil,' on which all life depends, and for killing the British soil in particular."⁷² So the methods by which Britons could reinvigorate their agriculture were a matter for debate among fascists. But, what was never at issue was the pressing need for the nation to rapidly and efficiently restructure itself into a self-sufficient fortress, with the ability to feed itself. The debate about agriculture in fascist circles, then, was not focused so

⁷¹ H. E. Crocker, "Agricultural Research at Rothamsted," *Fascist Quarterly*, Vol. 2, April, 1936, pp. 272-3.

⁷² Dan Stone, "The Far Right and the Back to the Land Movement," p. 188.

much upon a rejection of industry and urbanization or a wish to turn back the clock. Rather, the debate was dominated by the urgent need for self-sufficiency and finding the best methods for maximizing agricultural production. The questions examined and the solutions ventured by fascist agriculturalists were focused upon the methods to achieve this maximization; these mostly concerned scientific innovations, rationalized government assistance, mechanization, and efficiency.

The new British future proposed by its fascists would be one where industry and agriculture had recovered a productive balance. This meant balance within agriculture itself as well. As Robert Saunders, the “Blackshirt Farmer,” wrote in *Action*, “I look on a Balanced Agriculture as an industry in which practically every other man does *not* go in for milk or egg production, scrapping as he does so, all other activities...I want to see room for all, and with a reasonable profit for all. That way lies safety with success.” This meant a future with a balance between technological production and farming production as well. Saunders wrote to a fellow fascist, mentioning his admiration for the balance of the Nazi state and Fascist Italy, saying “Both these countries are contributing liberally to the wealth of scientific discovery and agrarian culture--- which can only be because the individual spirit has been fostered by the national ideal and not repressed.”⁷³

The British fascists were not alone in their search for balance between technology and pastoralism. In America during the interwar period there was a similar effort (though not on the part of fascists) to find this kind of reconciliation. Howard P. Segal is one of the first to explore this effort in his investigation of the Ford Motor Company’s village industries. Moving

⁷³ Letter from Robert Saunders to G. T. Wiltshire, January 23, 1936, Robert Saunders Papers, 119/A1/322.

production of parts out of the enormous assembly line factories, Henry Ford established small, rural production modules where workers had the ability to balance their lives between farming and industrial work. They were experimental and did not last past the Second World War, but Segal urges us to see these within the context of the intellectual movement of the time which tried to find a “proper balance” in modern life. As he says,

These nineteen experiments (village factories) ought properly to be appreciated as twentieth century versions of the “machine in the garden,” seeking new but still necessary balances between the all too common antitechnological and protechnological extremes. Certainly Ford’s repeated emphasis on uniting agriculture and industry through this and related schemes suggests the need of that same search for a balance in modern America. Yet the extremes continue to shape much of the rhetoric—and the reality—of technology in American society and culture. Ford tried to overcome those extremes, and to this extent at least his efforts must be deemed progressive.⁷⁴

It is helpful to understand the efforts of Britain’s extreme right to mold their own version of modernity within the context of other efforts. It helps clarify the fascist goal of finding a proper balance between industry and agriculture rather than attempting to be entirely techno-futuristic or entirely focused on a return to the idealized past.

Brothers in Modernity: British Fascism and the Technocracy Movement in America

The anti-modern aspects of British fascism must be examined within the broader context of its more predominant modernist rhetoric and policy. The section above sought to do just that, placing seemingly tradition-oriented rhetoric next to the more predominant calls for modernized agriculture. It follows that we should now attempt to find wider context for the British fascist attitudes that advocated technological modernity. Certainly the Italian and German fascist programs were part of that context, and British fascist leaders, like Mosley, borrowed chiefly from their examples. But, there were other movements as well, and these help us to see the

⁷⁴ Howard P. Segal, Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford’s Village Industries (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 154.

British extreme right as more forward-looking than reactionary. They help us to see British fascism as a part of a more general movement to bring politics into line with the technological present; and as one of many efforts to find the proper balance for technology in modern society.

One of the most instructive of these movements was the Technocracy movement in the United States. The Technocracy movement was very fragmented and inconsistent, presenting the historian a challenge in finding a clear program. Nevertheless, the Technocracy movement, in its later formation as a political entity, confronts us with several startling similarities and can even provide important insight into the authoritarianism of British fascism. While the Technocrats never gained any viability in electoral politics, they enjoyed a brief period of wide interest and appeal. Their view of society and their aspirations were certainly an expression of ultra-modernism; too modernist (and unrealistic) in fact, to gain any long term appeal.

This section will only provide a brief resume of the US Technocracy crusade and will chiefly focus on its evolution during the 1930's. Two very creditable works already exist which provide detailed histories and analysis of the Technocracy movement: Henry Elsner's The Technocrats: Prophets of Automation (1967) and William Aiken's Technocracy and the American Dream, published in 1977. While another detailed study of this movement is not necessary, what will be original about this section is bringing to light Technocracy's remarkable similarities with the fascist phenomenon and specifically the British variant. As we will see, the timing of Technocracy's greatest popularity corresponded directly with that of British fascism. Technocracy's leading authors identified a similar group of societal enemies (although, to its credit, Technocracy generally avoided racial discrimination). It diagnosed the ills of the state in nearly identical fashion, and the solutions that its most important leaders recommended were, in many cases, virtually identical. Despite all this, the Technocrats explicitly differentiated

themselves from Fascism, which they saw as particularly Italian, not yet recognizing a more general political phenomenon. As the 1930's progressed, however, some in the Technocracy movement would careen down the slippery slope, absorbing the policies, rhetoric and trappings of fascism.

The Technocracy movement was born out of an intellectual debate among leading thinkers, like Thorsten Veblen, who sought to make clear that the expansion of technology had brought the world into a new era. This new era required leadership that understood the power of technology to both create and destroy, and which possessed the expertise to manage science and technology for human benefit. This debate was seized upon by a young pseudo-intellectual named Howard Scott, who would become the movement's most public figure. Scott haunted the Greenwich Village district of New York, voicing this view to all who would listen, and proposing strangely modified structures of government and economics for the new mechanical age. To be sure, Scott was a bit of a fraud, falsely passing himself off as a scientific PhD and repeatedly lying about his background, including stories about his scoring winning touchdowns for the Notre Dame football team. Despite his false credentials, Scott eventually found kindred spirits among the faculty at New York's Columbia University. It was in the halls of Columbia, then, where Technocracy's vague agenda would take more concrete shape. The Columbia Professor, Walter Rautenstrauch, also believed in the developing philosophy of technocracy and he hired Howard Scott to begin a national survey of America's productive capacity. The study was based upon Scott's own conviction that the key to understanding technical society, and for regulating that society, was the supply and use not of capital, but of energy. Scott's belief was that an economy based on money value was inherently distorted. Only in an economy where value was assessed in terms of energy use and distribution, could the system benefit all. Based

upon this belief, in the late 1920's Rautenstrauch made Scott the Director of the great "Energy Survey of America." This was a funded research project to measure the productive potential of every region of the United States. Scott hoped it would lead to his strange vision of an economy based upon energy credits which would be exchanged without accumulation; that is to say without creating private profit.

While the survey continued at a glacial pace, economic circumstances changed drastically. After the 1929 crash and the onset of America's Great Depression, "Technocrats" began to find a wider audience as people searched for answers to what appeared to be the collapse of capitalism. Understanding the importance of this moment, Scott and Rautenstrauch began to publish a wide array of articles and treatises in the early 1930's. In 1932, their Continental Committee on Technocracy published its most important political manifesto, An Introduction to Technocracy. It sought to familiarize the public with the movement's principles and to announce the arrival of Technocracy as a viable political alternative. The first part was assembled by a committee of writers and editors, but Part II was written by Howard Scott himself. Multiple variations and excerpts followed in publications like *New Outlook*, *Time*, and *Harper's*, as the Technocrats launched a passionate press campaign. In terms of coverage, some critics saw the Technocracy alternative as viable and worthy of consideration, while other publications, like *Time*, derided the movement as a bunch of half-baked eccentrics. Howard Scott was especially criticized as a blatant fraud and liar.⁷⁵

Though the Technocracy movement had been gestating over two decades, it did not long survive the spotlight. By 1933, the movement had attracted many thousands of members and enthusiasts, but with increased membership came factions. There appeared numerous visions of

⁷⁵ *Time Magazine*, "Technocrat," Dec. 1926, 1933, p. 22.

just what a technocratic future would look like. The movement was seriously fragmented by the end of 1933, and by 1934 had lost most of its credibility among the general public. Interestingly, this mirrors the progression of the BUF, with its launch in 1932, its period of rising popularity from 1933 to late 1934, and then its rapid decline after 1934. Clearly the seriousness of the Depression in both Britain and the US by 1932, made the public more ready to listen to new and radical solutions. The proliferation of campaign materials and press coverage through 1933 and 1934 brought the programs of both movements into mainstream public discourse. But, neither could gain purchase on a wide scale. In Britain, the BUF was able to hang on and even have a brief resurgence in 1938-39, but the American Technocracy movement broke into a scattered mess, never managing a unified political party. In the US, of course, the nation elected Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 and as a result was getting a wave of radical New Deal legislation by 1934, to deal with the Depression. This went a long way in curtailing the growth and popularity of fringe political movements in the United States.

Although the Technocracy movement was a doomed and fragmented enterprise, we can assemble some basic tenets of the movement that produced a general program. The first shared principle of the Technocracy movement was that science and technology had brought the world into a new era where productive capacity had outdistanced the ability to consume. This was true, technocrats said, at least under the capitalistic system. Technocratic rhetoric termed the capitalist system, the “Price System,” shying away from the use of the word “capitalism.” Technocrats repeatedly emphasized the differences between “business” and “industry” or “finance” and “production.” This was a fanatically “productivist” philosophy, which, like fascism, pointed to “international finance,” as the great obstacle to general progress. As Scott wrote,

To maintain a balance between production and consumption with the number of factors involved, requires quantitative calculations beyond the frontiers of arithmetic. And so the technologist does not blame the men of business, finance and politics for not doing what they are not prepared to do. But when he examines the arithmetical impossibility of what they postulate as quantitatively possible, the entire system of *financial* business takes on the air of unreality; it becomes an impossible world of fairy-tale magic.⁷⁶

The price system, said Scott, built up over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had placed power in the hands of those who would use production for private profit. Therefore, it was inherently inefficient, with its ultimate objective not being technological efficiency or general welfare. The price system also placed real power in the hands of those who were not technically competent (financiers). So, “the price system vested power in the hands of businessmen, bankers, and financiers. These groups, knowing nothing but financial manipulation for profit, attempted to direct industry by *nontechnical* methods,” and they were quite clearly, “incompetent to deal with technological society.”⁷⁷ Technology had clearly advanced to the point where this would no longer produce the desired results for social welfare. A government system was now needed that was in line with technical progress. Technocrats in America, like pro-fascists in Britain, believed “society had not adjusted its institutions to the new reality. The social structure and institutions (liberal democracy and capitalism) were still those of ‘low energy non-mechanical production.’”⁷⁸ So, like so much of the British extreme right’s discourse we shall encounter in this study, the Technocrats believed that technology had moved the world into a new situation that required new forms of government and economic institutions. Liberal democracy and the capitalist system were outdated and “consigned to the historical junkpile.”

⁷⁶ Howard Scott, Introduction to Technocracy. (New York: John Day, 1933), p. 33.

⁷⁷ William Aiken, Technocracy and the American Dream. p. 73, 65.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

Producing an alternative political system, however, proved difficult for the technocrats. First of all, their early rhetoric had emphasized the distinction between and the separation of technology and politics. Also, the Technocracy movement, by the early 1930's, was split into several groups with alternate solutions. But, the most widely held of Technocracy's several recommended solutions, was a system that was essentially corporatist. They advocated a government to be established along the lines of industrial organization. Unlike fascism, however, the nation was not made the supreme entity. Rather, the American technocrats advocated a political unit which included all of North America.⁷⁹ Scott and his core organization proposed a central authority – the “Technate”—which would be divided into “functional divisions.” These would include the most important manufacturing and service industries like iron, steel, chemicals, electronics, transportation, housing, education, public health. Such corporations would also include the functions of government like “foreign relations” and tellingly, “social control.” Despite the efforts of Technocrat authors to dissociate themselves from fascism, it was simply corporatism by another name.⁸⁰

The Technocracy movement, then, shared a similar world view with British fascists and pro-fascists. They believed that technology had forced the world into a new reality that made democracy and capitalism obsolete and which required an industry-based government system to provide social justice. Even so, Technocrats, at first, did not call for the authoritarianism so much at the core of fascism. But, in 1933 the Technocracy movement began to move in just that direction.

⁷⁹ While this is a clear diversion with ultra-nationalistic fascism, it is strikingly similar to Mosley's post-war political program. Mosley proposed a European “continent-state” with Africa as its Empire. Only an entity this large, said Mosley, could hope to compete in the Cold War climate of super-powers.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

Earlier, some branches of the movement, such as the group in California, advocated a revolution led by engineers that would grant dictatorial powers to Franklin Roosevelt. In Chicago, the “Technocratic Party,” proposed a similar revolution that would make Howard Scott Dictator. Late in 1933, Scott broke with his old mentor Rautenstrauch, and took charge of a New York based faction which incorporated themselves as a business and named their political party, Technocracy Inc. The party used the older symbol of a circle similar to the “yin and yang” symbol, representing the balance between production and consumption, which was referred to as the “monad.” Scott placed a man named William Knight in charge of political organization. Knight was an aeronautical engineer who had been employed by various American subsidiaries of the German aircraft industry. Knight was clearly a Hitler supporter, and steered Technocracy Inc. toward the Nazi model. Scott began to wear a double breasted black suit, gray shirt and blue neck tie. The Technocracy Inc. rank and file, in turn, donned gray uniforms and adopted fascist style salutes of greeting. They also deployed fleets of metallic gray automobiles and rigid marches and formations. Knight was convinced that for Technocracy to move forward it would have to recognize that it was a *revolutionary* movement. Despite Scott’s embrace of his new authoritarian image, however, Knight was frustrated at Scott’s lack of charisma and the decisiveness needed in a modern “Leader.” As Aiken writes, “He thought Scott the ‘greatest prophet since Jesus Christ’ but was also certain the ‘he will never lead a revolution...’ In Knight’s view “Howard is not made out of the stuff of a Lenin, a Mussolini or a Hitler. We must have men who know what a revolution means and how to bring it about.”⁸¹

The largest of the Technocracy groups in the US planned a national convention in late 1933, in order to unite the movement. In their anxiousness to include all parties, they also invited

⁸¹ Ibid., P. 111.

Scott's Technocracy Inc. The convention, held in Chicago, was a bit of a fiasco, with Scott's troops saluting, marching, and trying to control events. The meeting broke up having produced no coherent agenda and no plans for a single, unified political party. It did, however, leave the clear message, from Scott's speeches and parading paramilitaries, that some in Technocracy saw authoritarian control as essential for the eventual success of the movement.

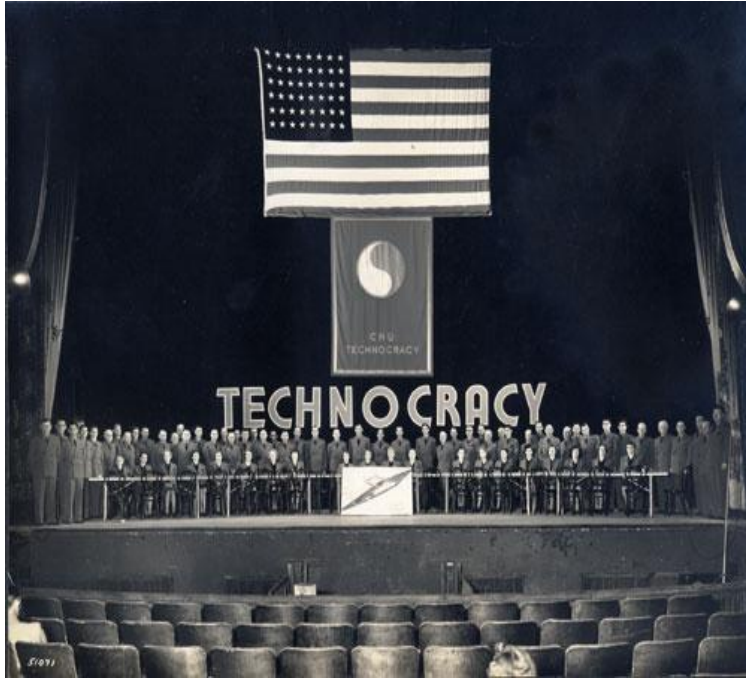
Many were appalled at Technocracy Inc.'s blatant adoption of fascist style and principles. But, perhaps it is not that surprising. In the Technocratic plans for a corporatist political structure, there existed agencies for "social control." At the head of the "functional divisions," there would be a "Control Board" and at its head there would be a single individual—a "technician-king" with overall control and responsibility. The objective was to have a technically based government eventually under the control of a supreme technician with "complete authority to act."⁸² As Aiken writes, "While they claimed not to adopt police-state methods to maintain the new order, their passion for order led in that direction."⁸³ This stands to reason for those who would seek to have society function with mechanical precision. For those who saw the efficiency of a machine as a suitable model upon which to base the functioning of society there existed a great challenge. Human beings, especially in masses, simply do not behave according to predictable laws, no matter how much a government might wish them to do so. Technocrats, who would seek to engineer society to operate according to mechanical principles, can only hope to do this by force. Here we see a fundamental link between the American Technocrats and the BUF – the "authoritarian high modernist" dream, discussed in the Introduction. But, forcing society into precise behaviors to yield regulated and predictable

⁸² Ibid., p. 139.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 141.

results, required the kind of authoritarian force that we can see so openly in fascism and which eventually showed its face in America's Technocracy Inc.

The predominance of British fascist discourse saw science and technology as the source of most of the key issues and challenges of the era. So government, they said, had to be rationalized, bringing scientists and technicians into the government to solve these problems. Meanwhile, a strong executive needed the power to regulate the process and plan on a national scale. This, they believed, would ensure the fair treatment and prosperity of the inventor, the financier, the industrial producer, and the consuming public. Mosley recognized the potential for unregulated science and technology to cause disruption and misery, but in no way discouraged its continued progress. He and his followers instead believed that a "scientifically organized State" could ensure that technical innovation produced the maximum good for the maximum number. And the BUF practiced what it preached, applying cutting edge technologies and marketing techniques to create its own products, popular icons, and brand-image. Their goal was to elevate the place of technological modernity rather than to diminish its place in the political nation, but always within the bounds of firm state control. Likewise, the fascist community's enthusiasm for a return to agriculture was in fact quite modern in its vision. Fascists saw agriculture as an industry which could fit into the corporate state and which had to be driven forward through the controlled application of science and technology. Thus modernized, British farming could finally realize a maximum of efficiency and output. A revitalized agriculture would not return Britain to the days of a bygone era, but help to find a more productive balance between technology and farming which would ultimately make Britain a safe, insulated, and self-sufficient nation.



Above, Technocracy Inc. representatives at a party meeting. The uniforms, symbols, and theatrics bear striking resemblance to the meetings of European and British fascists. Below, the famous BUF rally at Earl's Court in 1939.



CHAPTER THREE

“IN A CRASH HELMET, NOT A TOP HAT”

The Extreme Right Community and the New Technologies

While Chapter One examined British fascist groups specifically, this chapter and those that follow will expand the view to cover the wider extreme right community. The explicitly fascist individuals and groups will of course be included, but will be considered as one part of this broader political tendency. There was a wide spectrum of relationships to authoritarianism on the far right. Many, at one time or another, openly supported the BUF. But, just as often they kept their affiliations hidden, like the members of the secret January Club. Others supported fascism, but did not make formal ties. Some enthusiastically supported dictatorship abroad while rejecting it as an appropriate system for Britain. Some eventually rejected the BUF despite their faith in authoritarianism, while some supported the party even more as war threatened. Some remained pro-Mussolini in the late 1930's, but came to see Hitler's Nazi state as a terrible menace. Still others defended the Nazis all the more fervently as war approached.

The far right community during this period included a significant number of prominent figures who were pushing the nation forward in terms of technological modernity. The interwar period was a crucial period for many of the “new industries” which came to define twentieth century society— especially the automobile industry, the aviation industry, and radio communications. Among the elites on the extreme right who were important enough to help shape that group's political agenda, a disproportionate number of scientists, engineers, and high-tech industrialists were involved with these new technologies. As we have seen, Britain's fascist leaders like Mosley and Leese came from somewhat scientific or technological backgrounds, but as we survey the wider community we will find some of Britain's most eminent “moderns”

directly involved in extreme right politics. The figures described below will help to demonstrate a connection between the extreme right and technological modernity. Each played an important role in their respective fields or industries, but were also in a position to shape the extreme right political agenda and the modernizing side of its program. This isn't simply a group of right wingers who were interested in cars or airplanes. They funded organizations, founded organizations, owned and directed extreme right press organs, were prolific writers, or contributed through their celebrity. In demonstrating this connection, the chapter will also introduce many of the characters whose ideas and writing we shall dissect in the following chapters.

The Automobile and Motoring

Some of the most important figures in the new world of the automobile were attracted to the extreme right and became intimately involved its campaigns. These would include those who pioneered Britain's version of Fordist mass production and the most famous and glamorous of the new generation of motor racers. The extreme right press regularly covered automotive racing, road construction, fuel taxes, new models, and technical advances. The progress of German and Italian automakers (and racers) was not lost on these correspondents who used those automotive achievements as examples of fascists' fitness to govern in the modern world.

The first of these figures was the famous industrialist and philanthropist William Morris, later made Viscount Nuffield. He was born in Worcester in October 1877, but the family moved to Oxfordshire when he was only three years old. As a youth he was a talented mechanic, leaving school at fifteen to take an apprentice position in a local bicycle shop. Eventually he was able to open his own bicycle repair garage in Oxford High Street. Becoming enthralled with the combustion engine, he experimented with motor-bikes and then moved on to automobiles. He was able to open his own auto repair shop by 1902. By 1912 he had designed his own car model

and began to manufacture them via hand-fitting through the Edwardian years. During the First World War he shifted his production to munitions, but returned to auto manufacturing immediately after the cessation of hostilities. Throughout the 1920's Morris consciously adapted the techniques of mass production pioneered by Henry Ford in America. He also continued to absorb competitors like Wolseley Motors and Riley, integrating their models, manufacturing, and management into his own ever-growing operation. From humble beginnings, Morris would go on to create the largest automobile manufacturing company in Britain and by the mid-1930s Morris Motors would produce approximately 50% of British cars on the road. He was made a Baronet in 1929, a Baron in 1934, and then made the first Viscount Nuffield in 1938. After the Second World War Nuffield would continue running Morris Motors until his death in 1963, not living to see the days of the virtual disappearance of the British automobile industry. Having no children to which he could pass on his title or fortune, Nuffield also became a prolific philanthropist in the post-war years financing numerous charities. He also founded and endowed Nuffield College, Oxford, a top school for engineering and the sciences. Nuffield shifted his political support to Labour after World War II.

William Morris took his success quite seriously and felt the burden of responsibility that it brought. He was convinced that the new technologies and mass production he was pioneering in Britain would help launch the nation into a new era. Like Ford, he felt that new era would bring the common man access to the technologies he was producing. As his biographer Richard Overy has written, this leveling effect of the new technologies

was fundamental to his view of why he was producing cars and what he should do with his money. He had always cultivated the idea of being a man of the people. He saw his manufacturing role not as a purveyor of luxuries for the moneyed classes but as a manufacturer for the masses. 'From the first,' he claimed, 'I set out to cater for the man in the street.' He would go on producing cheaper and better cars 'until the worker goes to his factory by car.' He came to see himself more and more as the Englishman's Ford,

freeing the masses from isolation and immobility, presenting them with a technological key to a new society.⁸⁴

There has not been much written about the links between extreme right or fascist politics and the ethos of mass production. But some links did clearly exist. This can be obscured by the older Marxist view that fascism was fundamentally a tool of big capital which would crush labor through regimes of terror. Further, movements like that of Germany, had some basis in the anger of the alienated *mittelstand*, who saw mass production and mass distribution (big department stores) as the root of all evil. Early Nazi rhetoric, therefore, included much that spoke to this alienated class, whose most precious dream was a return to a guild system. In practice, however, Hitler's war machine was certainly not created via the guild system. The Nazi regime embraced big business, technocracy, and high technology, including mass production. Once in power, Hitler could be seen at the motor shows praising Fordism in his speeches and even encouraging members of his inner circle, like Hermann Goering, to purchase Ford automobiles. Later, of course, Hitler famously launched the ultimate state-sponsored mass produced automobile for the people – the *volkswagon* or “people's car.”⁸⁵

By the early 1930's Nuffield was appalled at the state of Britain and had decided that the nation needed a new leader and perhaps a new political structure. He was no political expert, but would appear to have been projecting his own ideas about managing an enormous industrial concern onto government. He wrote an article for Rothermere's *Daily Mail* in which he called for a newly streamlined government structure and a “real leader.” He was in agreement with

⁸⁴ Richard J. Overy, William Morris, Viscount Nuffield. (London: European Publications Ltd., 1976), pp. 111-112.

⁸⁵ See Gerhard L. Weinberg, Visions of Victory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 29-30 for a discussion of National Socialism, the dream of a classless society, and Hitler's intended use of the automobile to help bring this about.

Mosley's program from the "Manifesto," and having met him personally, decided Mosley represented the kind of force the nation needed. Nuffield understood Mosley's movement to be a "productivist" one. That is, a party which would encourage and liberate the manufacturing sector – an "industrial party" as he put it.⁸⁶ To this end Nuffield eventually gave Mosley his initial financial backing to start his own party. For the launch of the New Party Nuffield handed Mosley a significant grant of 50,000 pounds. Morris came from humble origins and he famously told Mosley, "Don't think, my boy, that money like this grows on gooseberry bushes. The first ten thousand took me a lot of getting."⁸⁷

Nuffield was one of Mosley's earliest and most committed supporters, but how much he remained a supporter of Mosley through his BUF years is difficult to tell. Direct links in the press or in personal papers is lacking. This may well be due to Nuffield's understanding that public alliance with a fascist party would be quite damaging for a famous industrialist. It may also, however, reflect a genuine reluctance to be associated with the party's more extreme viewpoints, especially those of overt anti-Semitism after 1934. The BUF press did from time to time, however, support Nuffield in print, particularly regarding Nuffield's offer to make his Oxfordshire manufacturing facilities available to the government for air rearmament. This suggests an ongoing relationship and mutual admiration even if there were no longer formal ties.

Perhaps because of his rich philanthropy and the undeniable success of Morris Motors, Nuffield's early biographers were chiefly concerned with his place as a British industrial hero. Certainly most of his biographers have seen him as a pivotal figure in the development of British

⁸⁶ Lord Nuffield, quoted in Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 242.

⁸⁷ Skidelsky, p. 242.



Above: Willima Morris, Lord Nuffield, who gave Mosley his initial political funding for the New Party in 1931, hoping it would be an “industrial party.” Below: Morris Motors’ Fordist assembly line, Ca. 1930’s.



modernity, “building technical change into the whole structure of the firm,” and creating “one of the first modern management firms.”⁸⁸ That heroic position has recently come under criticism especially from industrial scholar Roy Church, who sees Nuffield’s management of his interwar firm as less successful or scientific. According to Church, Nuffield would continually interfere in day to day operations, engineering, and business decisions, and hire and dismiss management based on his own personal whims. The result, says Church, was an “anarchic” organization that struggled for any kind of continuity.⁸⁹ So, Nuffield’s reputation as the ultra-modern manager-pioneer has been tempered by Church’s work, but we can see some reflection of Nuffield’s political leanings in his business practices. Certainly he remained authoritarian in his management style, though this often produced the ironic result, according to Church, of leaving peripheral managers to create intelligent new solutions to clear up Nuffield’s muddled interjections. He also displayed the same “productivist” attitudes that he pronounced in his endorsement of Mosley, in shaping the company management. Church says, “Several features recur as characteristics of the organization. One is the dominance of individuals whose decisions and actions were informed by engineering rather than accounting and financial criteria.” Fiercely committed to a production-over-finance culture, Nuffield, like many of the others we shall meet on the extreme right, was also averse to the educated Oxbridge set and preferred practical engineering types. He “had no use for ‘theoretical people,’” says Church, “a view which is consistent with Nuffield’s enduring suspicion of graduates.”⁹⁰ Frustratingly, very little in the way of personal papers or correspondence are left to provide a more penetrating view of

⁸⁸ M. Adeney, *Nuffield: A Biography*, p. 142.

⁸⁹ Roy Church, “Deconstructing Nuffield: the Evolution of Managerial Culture in the British Motor Industry,” *Economic History Review*, XLIX, No. 3, 1996, pp. 561-583.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

Nuffield's relationship with the extreme right, and Mosley apparently destroyed his correspondence records immediately after the War.

Another of Britain's famous auto designers was a visible pro-fascist in those days. He was Donald K. Marendaz. Marendaz had been a pilot with Mosley in the days of the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War. He flew from 1916 to 1918, was wounded, and then left the Air Corps a Lieutenant. After the war, Marendaz turned his mechanical skills to auto design. He was intimately involved with the launch of one of Britain's most famous old sports car designs, the Alvis. Later, in the twenties, Marendaz designed and launched his own series of sports cars, the Merandaz Specials. He produced these in his own manufacturing facility in Maidenhead and under the name of Marendaz Special Cars Ltd. His cars were not mass produced, like Morris', but hand crafted for high-speed racing. Marendaz raced several of the models himself as well as producing the cars for the famous racing couple, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Moss. Marendaz Specials remain today highly sought after and expensive collectors' items. His concern for Britain's rearmament and his flying past convinced him to turn again to aviation in 1936 when he opened Merandaz Aircraft Ltd. None of his planes, however, reached production by the time war had erupted.

During the 1930's Marendaz was another of Mosley's close supporters, but was less concerned with keeping his affiliation secret. In the 1940 18b round ups, Marendaz was arrested and imprisoned, though he was released soon after. To identify the number of "technological types," among the fascist rank and file is extremely difficult, if not impossible. But, Marendaz's comments help us to get some picture, saying he found himself in prison among a great number of technicians who could have been helping the war effort. Among Captain Luttmann-Johnson's papers is a circular written by the Liberal writer Guy Aldred who, though no fascist, was

affronted by the arrest and imprisonment without trial of British citizens under 18b. Citing Merandaz, Aldred wrote:

Then there are a large number of men from Company Directors and factory owners to technicians, skilled and unskilled, who could if at liberty, be rendering valuable service to the nation's war effort. Captain Merandaz, the famous aeronautical expert, himself once in detention, subscribed in a newspaper interview after his release that 'quite forty percent of those detained were perfectly safe to be released,' and also he knew of a hundred capable aircraft workers detained.⁹¹

After the war, Merandaz left Britain and sought his fortune in South Africa's new Afrikaner state, where he continued in the auto and aircraft design business until his return to Britain in the 1970's. He passed away in Britain in 1988.

In the late 1930's (most likely in 1938) another of Britain's well known automotive community formally joined the BUF. She was Fay Tylour, Britain's most famous female auto and motorcycle racer. Tylour, unlike most of the characters in this chapter, was not someone who was able to shape the political agenda or greatly influence the character of the extreme right. She was a minor player in politics to be sure, but the very fact that she was a female involved in the very "unfeminine" world of competitive racing and engineering (and political activism) does speak to the more modern nature of the movement. She joined apparently out of a fervent belief that Britain should not go to war with Germany. Her few writings do not indicate that she was a convinced pro-Nazi, and it was formerly assumed that she was attracted to the BUF mostly because of its new identity as a "peace movement," by 1938. However, a recent release of MI5 documents from the Public Record Office at Kew has shown that she was "in the habit of

⁹¹ Guy A. Aldred, "It Could Have Happened to You," Luttmann-Johnson Papers, HWLJ11 – 92/32/1.

hoarding pictures of Hitler and had in her possession a hymn in which his name was substituted for God's."⁹² The file also contains a letter she wrote to a fellow Irish racing driver in which she commented, "I love Nazi Germany and their people and their leader, and this war seems terribly unfair."⁹³ She was still connected to the party when the 18b arrests were made and was sent to prison. She was released along with the Mosleys in 1943, but on condition she move to Ireland until the end of the War. After the War she went to the United States where she attempted to resurrect her racing career by racing "midget" cars. Her attempts, however, to become an American citizen were thwarted probably because of her reputation as a fascist. She tells this story in an unpublished memoir titled, "Your Attention is Arrested...Under Defence Regulation 18b." Her brief account is quite cynical and contemptuous of those who frowned on her involvement in the BUF, and is certainly unapologetic.⁹⁴ She returned to Ireland after her retirement in the late 1950's and died in 1983.

But, of all the automotive community who aligned themselves with the extreme right, the most famous and glamorous figure was clearly Sir Malcolm Campbell. Campbell was a national hero whose face appeared in advertisements, trading cards, auto magazine covers, and merchandising all over Britain. Campbell was the designer of the ultra-futuristic car, the "Bluebird," which he would launch, in several updated versions from 1924 to 1935, to break successive land speed records.

Malcolm Campbell was born to middle class parents in Chiselhurst, Kent in 1885. Moving to London he was employed in the insurance industry where, after a difficult early period, he

⁹² PRO KEW, File Ref, KV 2/2144 (1939-1941).

⁹³ PRO KEW, File Ref, KV 2/2143 (1939-1941).

⁹⁴ Fay Taylour, "Your Attention is Arrested...Under Defence Regulation 18b," unpublished manuscript, British Union Collection – University of Sheffield, 5/13/A.

eventually was able to make a considerable fortune in selling libel insurance to newspapers. With his newfound financial security he was able to indulge his greatest love, aircraft and auto engineering. Campbell managed to build his own small aircraft and successfully fly it by 1909, making him one of the earliest Britons in flight. In the following year Campbell purchased a racing car and began racing at the legendary Brooklands racing track. That same year he won his first important racing trophy, winning the Vanderbilt Cup in America. When the Great War broke out Campbell joined up and eventually joined the Royal Flying Corps where he would become a flying instructor by the end of the war. Though it appears he never flew in fighters, he became convinced of the power of aircraft to change the future of conflict.

After the War, despite his enthusiasm for aircraft, he turned his attention fully to auto racing. He continued to be successful at the Brooklands track, winning an astounding 400 trophies throughout his career. But with his passion for speed and his drive to “push the envelope,” he began eyeing a new challenge. He began to work with the Sunbeam Motor Company to assemble a specially built automobile, with an exceptionally aerodynamic shape and powered by an enormous engine in order to pursue the world land speed record. Campbell had been one of the first to reach 100 mph back in 1910, and he continued to chase speed records for the rest of his career. His first record was set on the Pendine Sands along the coast of Carmarthenshire, Wales. Campbell reached the speed of 146.16 miles per hour in his “Sunbeam,” that year, but then staged another attempt in July of 1925. In that run, also in the “Sunbeam,” Campbell became the first human to travel at 150 mph. By then his celebrity appeal was blossoming. He began to appear on magazine covers, promotional materials and became the spokesman for Castrol motor oil. In the following year Campbell lost his record to John Parry-Thomas, and so prepared for another attempt in 1927. Throughout his career Campbell had named his high speed

cars “Bluebird,” supposedly after a play by Maurice Maeterlinck where the blue bird represented the eternally unreachable. Now using an ultra-modern looking vehicle of his own team’s design he again named his car “Bluebird.” He would set records again seven more times in successive variations of the “Bluebird.” After his 1931 land speed record at Daytona Beach, Florida he was given a knighthood upon his return to Britain. His greatest triumph, however, is generally acclaimed to be his incredible run at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah on September 3, 1935. There, in a radically designed new “Bluebird,” he attained the remarkable speed of 301.13 mph, becoming the first human to break the 300 mph mark.

Having accomplished the previously unthinkable in auto speed, Campbell then turned his efforts to setting records on water. He used his engineering expertise and the crack team he had assembled to build the world’s fastest speedboat, which he also christened the “Bluebird.” In 1939 he would break the water speed record as well reaching a top speed of 141.74 mph.

Sir Malcolm Campbell’s career, however, included more than just his glamorous pursuit of ever faster speed records. He was also a prolific journalist and author. In his work he championed the cause of the new technologies and rather urgently campaigned for a government that could deal with the new world they were bringing about. Campbell was firmly entrenched on the extreme right of British politics and had many relationships with its notable members and organizations. In the early 1930’s, as his celebrity was reaching its zenith, he became the automotive correspondent for Rothermere’s *Daily Mail*. In his columns he consistently called for more intelligent legislation and planning for Britain’s motor culture. He was not simply writing about motor racing, but was concerned with the spread of lower cost automobiles to ever broader markets and the expansion of Britain’s highway systems. His stories included campaigns for centralized planning and design of roads, signage, modified rules of the road, and

especially reducing the taxes being levied on motorists. Without these steps, he often argued, Britain could not hope to lead the modern world in the age of the automobile.

He also wrote a great many books on the subject. These included books on the glamorous side of racing like The Romance of Motor Racing (1936) and Speed on Wheels (printed after his death), which included profiles of famous drivers and reviews of Europe's best race tracks. But, it also included books looking into Britain's automotive future like The Roads and the Problem of their Safety, published in 1937 and A Key to Motoring (1938). As we will see in a subsequent chapter, Campbell was a crusader for the modern highway system (as opposed to the fragmented ribbon-roads of Britain) and looked to the Nazi German model of the autobahn as the best example.

Campbell was directly involved in politics as well, though he did not enjoy the same success that he did in smashing speed barriers. He ran as a Conservative in the 1935 national election for Deptford in Southeast London, but was defeated. Although he ran as a Conservative in that year, he had been affiliated with Mosley's BUF through the early 1930's and would remain a secret supporter even after the War. He was quite involved with the BUF's auto touring club and it is generally acknowledged that for his 1933 land speed record run, Campbell displayed the flash and circle insignia on the "Bluebird" car.⁹⁵ Though he was publicly quiet about his affiliation with the BUF, he was popular and well known within the party. Campbell also worked with fellow engineer / journalist C. G. Grey, the editor of the journal *The Aeroplane*, who we will meet in the next section. Grey was a committed pro-fascist and air rearmament enthusiast and shared most of Campbell's politics. Grey, several of his own far right reporting staff, and

⁹⁵ Confirmed through a personal communication with Peter McCarron, former member of the Union Movement and currently administrator of the "Friends of Oswald Mosley." While McCarron maintains that a photo does exist of Campbell's Bluebird with the BUF insignia, this author has not been able to locate any photographic evidence despite extensive searches.

Campbell worked to produce a quite thorough examination of the history of motor propulsion in popular form. The resulting book, complete with extensive photographs and diagrams, was called Power and Speed: The Story of the Internal Combustion Engine on Land, at Sea, and in the Air, and was published in 1938. The extreme right community, here, collaborated to promote high technology and its increasing importance in the modern world.

Campbell, like many others, was deeply concerned with the world situation in the latter half of the 1930's and expressed his views in two books. The first book, The Peril From the Air (1937), was a hard look at the potential that aircraft had on the political situation and Britain's national security. As the world seemed to be moving closer to war, the book was essentially a fervent plea for the Conservative Government to expand its air rearmament program that had begun in 1936. The second book, Drifting to War, published in the same year, laid out Campbell's view of the international situation. His assessments in that book were generally in line with his extreme right record, including his view that Communism was the supreme threat to the world, that Labour was dangerous to Britain, and that Britain's free press abused its freedoms and created sedition. Again in Drifting to War Campbell attacked the successive interwar Governments for neglecting Britain's defenses and placing the country in an extremely dangerous position. Contrary to the most committed pro-fascists of the day, though, he did not defend Nazi Germany or promote its cause. This raises questions as to the level of his fascist commitment by 1937, and it would appear that by that year he had come to see Nazi Germany as the greatest menace to world peace. Still, he did hold the characteristic extreme right position that Britain should not interfere with the fascist nations who had "accomplished so much," saying

I am a very strong believer in allowing every country to choose and to live under its own form of government. If we choose the democratic institutions which have served us well

enough, I conceive that it is no business of anybody else. Similarly, Germany has adopted National Socialism, and it must be conceded that it probably saved the country from ruin by the Communists. The German people love discipline, and they certainly have enough of it under the Nazi Regime, which seems to suit their case admirably. The same is to be said of Fascism in Italy. Mussolini and his Fascists, equally with Hitler in the case of Germany, saved the country from chaos.⁹⁶

Rather than Britain pursuing conflict with the fascist nations, Campbell held out hope that, “Today, Germany appears to be in a more favourable frame of mind than ever towards an understanding with this country. I do not think there could be any better way of ensuring peace in Western Europe than by a close understanding between Germany and this country.” All this was contingent, said Campbell, on it being “possible to trust the pledged word of Germany or to depend upon her observance of her solemn pledges for a moment longer than suited her ultimate purpose.”⁹⁷ So, Campbell’s extreme right position was still firmly in place in terms of a passionate belief in modernized defenses, admiration of the fascist system, and a belief in an insular economic and foreign policy for Britain. But his position had modified by the late 1930’s as he changed his mind about Germany; not necessarily its National Socialism, but Hitler’s dishonesty and aggression in the world arena.

During the years of the Second World War, Campbell was involved again with the Air Training Corps (working with a fellow member of the extreme right, John Chamier), but his contribution was limited as he suffered from a long illness. He passed away on December 31, 1948. He had married three times during his life and, similar to Mosley, was rumored to have had numerous and scandalous affairs. He left three children, one of whom, Donald, became a world famous car and boat racer like his father, setting eight speed records in his lifetime. He died an untimely death in 1967 in a high speed crash.

⁹⁶ Sir Malcolm Campbell, Drifting to War (London: Hutchinson, 1937), p. 151.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

Aircraft

The link between air technologies and the extreme right reaches as far back as the beginning of Britain's own (motorized) aviation tradition. The connection exists in the person of Britain's first aviation pioneer to leave the ground in a mechanized aircraft, the British answer to the Wright Brothers, A. V. Roe. Alliot Verdon Roe was born in Patricroft Eccles, near Manchester, on April 26, 1877, to a middle class family, the son of a local doctor. As a youth he was enterprising and self-reliant, traveling to Canada as a fourteen year old and making his own way by working odd jobs. On his return to England, he worked as an apprentice on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway before going to University and earning a degree in Marine Engineering at King's College London. After his degree was complete Roe put to sea aboard the *Inchanga* as fifth engineer. His lone biographer, Edward Lanchberry, says that it was aboard ship that Roe observed the sea birds' ability to hover in the air, and first began applying his engineering mind to the problem of human flight. Roe, a bicycle racer and enthusiast like the Wright brothers, was captivated by their accomplishment at Kittyhawk in 1903 and began written correspondence with them. He then put all his effort into an attempt to build his own machine, renting a small shed at the auto racing ground at Aldershot in the southwest suburbs of London. There he faced constant ridicule and threats to have his equipment thrown out, until he was able to produce the machine that took him into the air in 1907. In achieving this first for British aviation, Roe won a 75 pound prize offered by the *Daily Mail*. By 1909 Roe had designed a new machine with all British parts and on July 23 of that year launched the first flight of an entirely British machine, flown by a British citizen. His famous tri-plane, which he used on that day, today rests in the Royal Museum of Science and Industry.

In 1910 Roe formed his own aircraft production company and began the development and manufacture of some of Britain's most important models. The Avro Company, as it was called,

eventually produced the Avro 504 which was an outstanding combat model during the First World War and because of its value as a training plane, stayed in production until 1931. Because of his contributions to British aviation and especially his services in war time, Roe was knighted in 1929. But, despite his new title, Roe grew ever more disenchanted with democratic government and especially with financial capitalism. Roe was an avid “productivist,” and was outraged that banks and stock speculations should determine the health of economies rather than those who innovated and manufactured. As a result of these frustrations Roe was attracted to extreme right politics, and was a direct supporter of Mosley and the BUF. Roe was fairly secretive about his affiliation, though he was known to make public addresses to pro-fascist audiences. Roe also had lost a great deal of his own fortune in the stock crash of the early 1930’s, especially on Crossley Motors stock. This must certainly have intensified his hatred of “international finance,” and fed his own campaign for monetary reform which lasted into the postwar years. William Joyce (later the notorious Lord Haw-Haw), BUF member and fervent anti-Semite, wrote in *Action* of his chance meeting of Roe on the way to a lecture. In describing their chat, Joyce touches on the recurring theme of the modernism and supposed rationality of fascism. He uses Roe’s aviation triumphs to emphasize his point that many modern innovations faced ridicule and accusations of “irrationality,” from those who lacked vision and were rooted in the past. But, said Joyce, accomplishments such as Roe’s technological creations should have reassured fascists that their modern political innovation would ultimately prove the critics wrong and take flight as well.

I was talking recently to Sir Alliot Verdon Roe, popularly known for his famous “Avro.” He was on his way to Oxford, there to deliver an address to the Oxford University Fascist Association. He had chosen as his theme his favoured subject of Monetary Reform, in which he is no less expert than in engineering. His audience should feel privileged to have an address from a man who must be regarded as one of the greatest pioneers of aviation in the world. Some time ago, however, he told me of his efforts a few years

before the war to convince the Government that aircraft might be used for military purposes. He was actually laughed to scorn and regarded as a lamentable mystic. Now not only he, but the whole world, knows how right he was, and this overwhelming vindication of his judgment must give him confidence when he encounters the incredulous leers of those who regard monetary reform as a subject within the purview of mysticism.⁹⁸

Despite his affiliation with British fascism, Roe was not locked up when the 18b arrests were carried through. He was doubtless considered too valuable to the war effort. But, after the war Roe continued his crusade for monetary reform and continued his support, though less formally, for Mosley's Union Movement. Lanchberry's biography, titled simply A. V. Roe, was part of the "Men of the Modern Age" series and like Joyce's comments, emphasizes Roe's early struggles against the obstacles of non-visionary minds. This is an important element of Roe's background and personality to understand. In this way he is similar to many other technological innovators whom we will encounter in this study. A distinctive figure emerges: the frustrated visionary, exasperated with those who resist modernity and change. Additionally, these men were ready to blame "luddite stupidity" in business, Government and defense for their own difficulties and for those of the nation.

This aspect of Roe's experience comes out clearly in Lanchberry's biography. It must be said that the book is more of a promotional biography than a penetrating study. Nonetheless, key aspects of Roe's personality emerge in its pages that help explain his links to the extreme right. The majority of the book concerns Roe's early days fighting the establishment for funds, facilities, and credibility and then celebrating his triumphs in aviation over such obstacles. The last chapter of the biography, however, focuses on Roe's obsession with monetary reform. While it is clearly outside the scope of a "friendly" biography of an aviation pioneer, Lanchberry

⁹⁸ William Joyce, "The World, the Flesh, and Financial Democracy," *Action*, June 4, 1936, p. 2.



Sir Alliot Verdon Roe with his tri-plane at Brooklands, 1907. Roe was obsessed with elevating the “producer” and inventor and diminishing the power of finance capitalism. He would become an avid supporter of British fascism and monetary reform.

says, “currency reform is so strongly the second interest of the man that some mention of the brief principles of Sir Alliot’s proposed system must be made.”⁹⁹ Lanchberry harkened back to Roe’s early days of struggle in explaining that Roe was dedicated to removing the financial barriers for Britain’s future innovators: “Sir Alliot’s interest in currency reform undoubtedly arose as a result of his early difficulties in finding money for his experiments, and a desire to see that other young men of initiative should not be similarly handicapped in developing ideas that might benefit the human race.”¹⁰⁰ Roe’s proposed system involved the state creating, controlling, and distributing all currency rather than banks. “Money would be solely a means of exchange,” said Lanchberry, “not tied to any gold or sterling standard, but related entirely to goods. In other words, for every one pound issued there would be goods to the value of one pound to back it, and the people would be issued with currency to buy to the full extent of what they could produce in goods and services.”¹⁰¹ Roe believed above all, and not surprisingly, that innovators were the originators of wealth, and should never have to go into debt simply to finance inventions. Under his proposed system the state would be in charge of the distribution of capital to the inventor, after determining if that inventor’s projects had potential benefit to the nation. No unqualified bankers would be involved in the decision whether or not to finance innovators, nor would the inventor be “handicapped by bank overdrafts for financing their experiments.” What Roe wanted to hear the Government say to its scientific and technological community was, “If you will invent and create...we will provide you with the

⁹⁹ Edward Lanchberry, A. V. Roe: Men of the Modern Age, Vol. 7. (London: The Bodley Head, 1956), p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

currency in order that you may buy to the fullest extent of your production. In other words, the Government would issue money to keep pace with productive capacity.”¹⁰²

Roe’s dreams of monetary reform were shared by several on the extreme right, but gained very little purchase among those in prominent positions. But, said Lanchberry, most people who lacked intelligence or imagination could not perceive the potential of technology (or a new monetary system) to take the world forward. Their response was most often to laugh at and denigrate those very people who were brilliant enough to propel the world forward into a better life.

Many men of genius and vision often have an idea so unorthodox and far ahead of their time, that it is impolitely regarded as their bee-in-the-bonnet... There is no disguising the fact that his views on currency are regarded by lovers of orthodoxy as those of a crank. That description does not worry him. Fifty years ago he was being called a crank because of his ideas on flight... That is the second dream (monetary reform) of Sir Alliott Verdon-Roe, a dream that has found no favor with successive Government ministers that he has approached. But, then his approach to the Secretary of State for War in 1909 about the use of the aeroplane for military purposes likewise met with no encouragement; and even in 1939, the aeronautical correspondent, Oliver Stewart, wrote of Sir Alliott Verdon-Roe’s prophecy of trends in aviation that are now taken for granted in this jet age: ‘His statement about methods of propulsion through the air without the use of the ordinary air-screw or by a method of flapping wings, for instance, seems to be as far removed from present realization as to constitute an imaginary dream rather than a practical possibility.’¹⁰³

Sir Alliott had foreseen the use of aircraft in warfare and the coming of the jet engine, and had been rudely dismissed both times by the men of the industry, said Lanchberry. Did it not now seem probable that Roe’s detractors on the monetary issue were just as hampered by their own intellectual limits and inability to see the future?

Another of the key figures from Britain’s early days of flight who hovered on the extreme right of British politics was John Adrian Chamier. Chamier was born in India to a military

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 135.

family in December of 1883. He went to Britain to attend the Royal Military College at Sandhurst and soon after began his military career with the Indian Army. He remained in the Colonial Army from 1902 until the First World War. It was during the War that he joined the Royal Flying Corps and was eventually trained as a pilot. After a distinguished service in the War he remained on as the Royal Flying Corps was transformed into the Royal Air Force. Chamier was named Technical Directory at the Air Ministry in 1927 and then Air Commodore in 1928, a position he held until his retirement in 1929. In the early 1930's Chamier became disillusioned with the Labour Government and eventually turned his support to Mosley's BUF. He continued to be affiliated with the BUF through the 1930's even as he was named Secretary of the Air League of the British Empire in 1933. The Air League was an organization which sought to promote air-mindedness throughout Britain and the Empire, building facilities, training pilots, reviewing new air technologies, and aiding young air engineers with scholarships. Chamier was committed to propelling Britain forward in the area of air defense but he was not as strident or as public about his politics as many others on the far right. His appointment to head the Air League, however, did prompt a very vocal pro-fascist, C. G. Grey, to announce Chamier's new role with great relish. In his journal *The Aeroplane*, Grey expressed the anxieties virtually all on the extreme right felt about Britain's deteriorating air power and suggested that a man like Chamier could help stem the tide of disintegration.

If we allow our enemies on the continent to persuade our pacifist P. M. and our weak-kneed Foreign Office to destroy the fighting power of the RAF...then we shall leave not only this England, but all our lines of communication to the rest of the Empire open to attack by whatever enemy may rise in the future...Therefore, the appointment of Air Commodore J. A. Chamier to the Secretary General of the Air League...must give great encouragement.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ C. G. Grey, *The Aeroplane*, May 31, 1933, p. 957.

As Britain drifted closer to war with Germany in 1938, Chamier was made the First Commandant of the Air Training Corps which was an official Government organization for training young pilots. He would work with Malcolm Campbell at the Training Corps during the War Years until Campbell's health forced him out. This group was crucial in Britain's training a reserve of qualified flying men for the trials that would follow in the early years of the war.

The man who had written the announcement of Chamier's appointment, C. G. Grey, was perhaps the most abrasive and openly pro-fascist figure among the air community in Britain. Grey was the chief editor of *Jane's Aviation Guide* and edited his own magazine, *The Aeroplane: Incorporating Aeronautical Engineering*, which was a strange hybrid of political sheet and technical journal. Grey had begun the "funny little paper," as early as 1911, covering the shaky first steps of the air pioneers. He was the principle writer and editor, as he remained throughout the inter-war years. He had created his own aviation paper after a short period writing for the auto journal, *Autocar*, which had sent him to cover the world's first air show at Paris in 1908. During the war and into the early 1920's Grey was a noted engineer who promoted ideas in air design which a few corporate air producers actually adopted. Through the interwar years, Grey's commentary was increasingly anti-democratic and into the 1930's became quite openly pro-fascist. He routinely criticized the British government, in rather obnoxious terms, for its scaling back of British air defense and for its failure to develop, fund, and otherwise promote aviation. The first pages of each issue of his journal began with his diatribes on the issues of the day, mostly as they related to "air politics." These sections reflected his terror of Soviet Bolshevism, his anti-Semitism, his hatred of collective security, and his admiration for Italian Fascism and Hitler's regime. He was especially incensed at Britain's membership in the League of Nations and the checks that membership continued to put on Britain's air expansion.

In a letter to Geoffrey Dorman, the aviation correspondent for Mosley's *Blackshirt* and then *Action*, Grey explained his infamous tirades against the Government that weekly filled the columns of *The Aeroplane*. He wrote to Dorman that "You and I have one thing in common, that is that we have habitually been rebels against authority, not because we are naturally rebels, but because we have such instinctive reverence for authority that we are driven to desperation by the fools whom God has been pleased to set in authority over us."¹⁰⁵ Such a statement helps explain Grey's fierce admiration for authoritarianism. Despite this, however, he was not a self-proclaimed fascist, nor was he a member of the BUF or any of the other explicitly fascist organizations in Britain. He had wide contacts within the aircraft industry to be sure, and also among the British extreme right. He was a regular correspondent with Captain H. W. Luttmann-Johnson, who was the Honorable Secretary of Mosley's January Club, for instance, although he would not commit himself to membership. In a letter to Luttmann-Johnson he explained his ultimate decision not to formally throw in his lot with the BUF. Strangely, his rejection of Britain's ultimate ultra-nationalist was related to his xenophobic anti-alienism; still, Grey could not quite put his finger on his own reluctance.

Frankly, Mosley is more like a Leader than anybody I have seen in this country. And yet I still can't quite convince myself that he is the man to save the country. He seems to have all the qualities...He is the most inspiring speaker I have ever heard. His reasoning is the most clear-cut incontrovertible argument I have ever met...He has a strong foreign strain in him somewhere, Italian I should think, which makes him un-English in manner and appearance. But, after all, this country was built up by foreigners time after time...so being partly a foreigner ought not to be an objection. After all, the Italians have provided more great men than any other one nation, including Napoleon Bonaparte. So I don't know why I cannot quite accept Mosley as the Savior. Musso is by far the greatest statesman in the world today and I cannot see him fighting either us or Germany.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Grey to Dorman, Papers of Capt. H. W. Luttmann-Johnson, HLJ11.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Grey to Luttmann-Johnson, Luttmann-Johnson Papers, HL-J1 – 43.

In 1936, *Action* ran a spread celebrating the twenty fifth anniversary of *The Aeroplane*. Dorman wrote the copy and pointed out that Grey was one of Britain's true pioneers of the modern age. Despite the fact that he was not a member of the BUF, Dorman said that he doubted if Grey "realizes that his views are pure Fascism." Dorman praised Grey's achievement in building *The Aeroplane* from "nothing to the most influential aviation paper in the world." He had done this, according to Dorman, despite his abrasiveness and his eyebrow raising slashes at Britain's politicians. At one point, the advertisers of *The Aeroplane* lobbied against such overt criticism and the obnoxiousness of his views but, said Dorman, Grey's integrity won the day.

He is quite incorruptible and cannot be bought. Once when he was adopting a policy which he himself believed was best for the future of aviation, the aircraft industry thought otherwise. They attempted to muzzle him by threatening to withdraw advertisements. C. G. explained to his fellow directors that he believed the course he was taking was the right one and he intended to stick to it, even though it might mean considerable personal loss. I know that in his own mind on that occasion he contemplated resigning, or even being asked to resign by the other directors. As it was, the other directors backed him up and the plot failed...C. G. Grey has, during the twenty five years as editor of the "Aeroplane," materially altered for the better the trend of things aerial, not only in Britain, but over all the world. May he long live to help keep Britain first in the air.¹⁰⁷

Another of Britain's most powerful men of the aircraft industry who was directly connected with fascism and pro-fascism was Vincent Vickers. Vickers was one of the heirs of the founders of Vickers Ltd. Aircraft Co. and armaments manufacturing concerns. The Vickers Company had been founded in Sheffield as a steel foundry as early as 1828 by Edward Vickers and George Naylor. Through the Victorian years the company had branched out into various engineering enterprises including metallurgy, shipping propellers, and had famously absorbed the Maxim machine gun works. In the Edwardian period, Vickers had diversified into auto manufacturing and eventually aircraft production. The First World War vastly expanded the fortunes of Vickers Ltd., as the firm produced all manner of armaments including machine guns, shells, and

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Dorman, "A Great Pioneer Celebrates a Jubilee," *Action*, June 11, 1936, p. 11.

torpedoes for the armed services. During the interwar years, Vickers absorbed Armstrong Aviation and Supermarine to create the much larger Vickers-Armstrong Ltd. Vincent Vickers served on its Board of Directors for twenty two years.

Vincent C. Vickers was born in January of 1879 and would go on to receive a classical education at Eton and Oxford. He served as a Deputy Lieutenant of the City of London and also as a Director of the London Assurance, a post which he held until his death in 1939. In 1910 Vickers was appointed Governor of the Bank of England, which seems to have had a profound effect on his world view. He resigned the position in 1919 and during the interwar years he would throw himself into the cause of economic and monetary reform. He produced very little published work in his life, but in his waning years he was able to complete a small book that laid out his views, Economic Tribulation. The book is a blend of ideas, some of which seem to endorse authoritarian ideas, and some which do not. The work would not indicate that Vickers was a clear pro-fascist, but, he did use the same crusading language against the bogey of “international finance,” which he believed was ruining the modern world. We must remember that the book was assembled in 1939 as Britain entered the War and this no doubt accounts for its unequivocal position against Nazi Germany. He wrote, “No greater threat to humanity and the progress of civilization can be conceived than the general spread of the Hitler regime of brute force.”¹⁰⁸ But, by this time (he had completed the manuscript in 1939 and it was first published in 1941 by one of his children), much had changed. Earlier, in 1934, Vickers was very pleased to be part of Mosley’s secret January Club. The January Club’s discretion no doubt appealed to Vickers because of his prestigious position, as did the opportunity to meet like-minded elites of Britain’s industrial community. Vickers had written to Luttmann-Johnson about joining the club

¹⁰⁸ Vincent C. Vickers, Economic Tribulation. (London: the Bodley Head, 1941), p. 64.

in February of 1934, saying, “I shall be most pleased to become a member of the January Club; (I am, however, no authority on monetary policy although I have been a proponent of monetary reform for about 9 years and have worked very hard at it.)”¹⁰⁹

Vickers, like so many of the extreme right, had become a committed productivist. He believed in the power of industry to produce all those things which could create a prosperous and rich society. He was convinced, however, that finance capital had divergent interests from manufacturing and would generally act for its own benefit, thereby injuring the greater community. His thinking was essentially that of Mosley and his followers, who were most outraged at the investment of British capital in foreign manufacturers who undermined British production. Like most British fascists Vickers was concerned that the world’s new ability to produce far in excess of demand was being perverted and exacerbated by self-absorbed financiers. Until a new system of distribution was formulated by the state, he believed, Britain could not fulfill the potential of the brave new world that technology had made possible.

With the help of nature, mankind today is capable of producing far more than mankind can consume; more food than he could eat, more clothing than he could need, more houses than he could occupy, more entertainment than he could enjoy, more protection, more work, more leisure, more opportunity, and a more contented mind...How fortunate we all are, and how contented we should all be!...If the producers are waiting to produce more, if ships are waiting to carry the goods...then the fault must lie with the consumer. Why does he hold back the trade and commerce and progress of the world, and prevent the consummation of a lasting peace by deliberately refusing to avail himself of the good things the world can offer him? The answer is obvious. The consumer cannot afford to buy more; he has not enough money! ...Those whose main business it is to make profit out of short-term money are inclined to have a short-term outlook. Those who deal in money and who profit by the indebtedness of others may attempt to argue that finance is still the handmaiden of Industry and that the fault is in reality one of ‘over production’ or industrial inefficiency; or that the world has been living beyond its means... We do not allow brewers to dictate our licensing laws nor the hours of opening public houses, any more than we allow motorists to decide our speed limits...In the same way, a very large section of the community is becoming un-reconciled to the fact that the nation’s

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Vincent C. Vickers to H. W. Luttman-Johnson, February 24, 1934, Luttman-Johnson Papers, HL-J1-18.

monetary and financial policy is influenced, if not entirely directed, by the directors of the money industry and international finance, whether these be British subjects or not.¹¹⁰

Many of the extreme right themes are present, including the outrage at the power of investment capital over industrial production, the need for state intervention instead of free-trade apathy, and even anti-alienism, which in matters financial was generally aimed against Jews. As anti-Nazi as the book clearly was in time of war, its general precepts were rooted in the pro-fascist movement of the earlier interwar years.

Finally, Vickers' voice is a predominantly modern one. Although he was a product of the late Victorian age and Oxbridge, he acknowledges that the "old school of thinking," to use his words, had to be scratched for the realities of the new age. As he wrote to Luttman-Johnson, "the older I become, the more I find myself in sympathy with the new era and the need for a new outlook!"¹¹¹ He saw the finance capitalism of the City as well as democratic governments which were supposedly slaves to the "square mile," as part of the old system which was being replaced elsewhere by a new wave. As far as Britain being a true democracy, Vickers had his doubts. He believed the nation to be as much a dictatorship as Italy or Germany, but under the rule of "Financial Dictatorship." He believed a new vision of modernity was necessary and unavoidable:

"Slowly but inevitably the old financial system is crumbling under the weight of modern conditions and the better education of the people; the sooner it crumbles the better, and the sooner it gives way to a better and more modern technique the sooner the world will achieve good will and peace among men. The present order of things must change...the faults of the old system are driven out into the open by new circumstances, and by the

¹¹⁰ Vickers, Economic Tribulation, p. 49, 51.

¹¹¹ Letter from Vickers to Luttman-Johnson, February 24, 1934, Luttman-Johnson Papers HL-J1-18. Underlining his.

increasing demands of democracy for social justice which it is the aim of the *new school* to make possible and to achieve.”¹¹²

Another convert to the new age of the air, the war hero and icon T. E. Lawrence, was attracted to the extreme right. Lawrence, like Grey, was in sympathy with fascism, but reluctant to join any British groups. Lawrence might seem like a member of the “old school,” as he was an Oxford antiquarian and archaeologist leading up to his legendary feats in World War I. Lawrence, however, perhaps because of his illegitimacy and his abrasive and maverick attitudes spent his life, like many on the extreme right, as an outsider. After the war that made him a legend in the Hejaz, and the grueling political process that formed the new states of the Middle East, Lawrence abandoned active politics. Instead, in 1922 he took the remarkable step of enlisting himself (under the false name of Ross) in the R.A.F. as a mechanic with the rank of “private.” He never slackened in his commitment to the new world of the airplane or his fellow airmen. By the early 1930’s Lawrence was disenchanted with British politics and the state of the nation and began corresponding with members of the far right community like those in the January Club. Invited to join, he declined, but expressed some of his affinities in a letter to Luttmann-Johnson. In it he wrote, “I want your movement to hurry up and put an end to the license of the press...I suppose Mosley is doing his best. He is demonic and a leader of conviction...but the staffwork very patchy. If only you had some real opposition. These Jews, Diehards, and Liberals are like wet brown paper. What faces you actually, is the machine of government (sic).”¹¹³ The depth of Lawrence’s convictions for extreme right politics are difficult to judge from his own career. But, he was routinely celebrated in the extreme right press, and at

¹¹² Vickers, Economic Tribulation, p. 24, 26.

¹¹³ Letter from T. E. Shaw (Lawrence) to H. W. Luttmann-Johnson, May 1, 1934. Luttmann-Johnson Papers, HL-J1-19.

the time of his death, *Action* declared that Lawrence was preparing for a visit to Hitler to help build up goodwill between the two nations. Even today, if one visits the “Friends of Oswald Mosley” website, T.E. Lawrence is listed among the prominent supporters and inspirations for Mosley’s interwar movement.

What exercised Lawrence most in the early 1930’s was the Government’s refusal to expand air rearmament, one of the loudest cries of the far right. Lawrence complained, “I have now served for 12 ½ years in the RAF and nearly lost what withered heart I possess (at 45) to my fellows here...Perhaps the Airmen are almost the best of their time, however. They have a job too big ever to be wholly done, and new enough to be wonderful...Ours could be the best Air Force in the world if the “chiefs” would let us.”¹¹⁴ In his writing about life in the RAF, Lawrence expressed his sympathy with the modern age. He compiled his notes and journal entries from his RAF experiences from 1922 to 1926 into a book, which first reached the press only after his death. This book, The Mint, was filled with the earthy and often vulgar life Lawrence led among his fellow “rankers,” but it also revealed his fiercely held convictions about air technologies and the future. He clearly felt a close relationship with his fellow airmen and mechanics that he had never before experienced as they worked together to blaze a new trail in human history. “We are,” he wrote, “greatly useful here in the eyes of all who accept our premiss (sic) that the conquest of the air is the first duty of our generation.”¹¹⁵ But, beyond the miracle of flight and flying machines, Lawrence saw the emerging importance and power of the

¹¹⁴ Letter from T. E. Shaw (Lawrence) to H. W. Luttman-Johnson, May 17, 1934. Luttman-Johnson Papers, HL-J1-20.

¹¹⁵ T. E. Lawrence, The Mint. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p. 181.



T. E. Lawrence (as “ranker” T.E. Shaw in the RAF) on his Brough motorcycle, 1934. The archaeologist and literary figure found himself as a technician. He believed that the old class divisions would be broken down eventually by those who “understand the souls of engines.”

technician. That power would result in a new world where old traditions and boundaries of class would be broken. This was already showing, he said, because “the Air Ministry recognizes a rightness in our worship of the technical engineer, by promoting sergeant or sergeant-pilot the best men from the ranks: Those who have understanding of the souls of engines, and find their poetry in the smooth tick-over. They form our aristocracy of *merit*.” The prim, arrogant officers he so loathed would give way to the power of machines and those who understood them. In the coming age, “the airmen of the future will not be so owned, body and soul, by their service. Rather will they *be* the service, maintaining it, and their rights in it, as one with the officers...soon, when they have made their style felt, officers will only enter the airmen’s rooms accompanied, by invitation, guest-like and bare-headed, like us in an officer’s mess.”¹¹⁶ So, for Lawrence the machine held the power to erase the old traditional class distinctions. The flyers and mechanics would come to dominate the services as the efficacy of the machine transcended class and aristocracy gave way to technocracy.

The man who had spent his youth studying crusader castles, working as an archaeologist, and as a hero-soldier, finally “found himself” as a technician. The extreme right was keen to appropriate Lawrence’s celebrity for their cause, though he resisted it. There were many aspects of his life that appealed to the fascists and pro-fascists. He had been a heroic imperialist and was now an airman. Also, his championing of Arab independence merged very conveniently with the far right’s anti-Semitism. This was continually brought up amidst the debate about creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Lawrence died a seemingly “modern” death as well. Admittedly addicted to high speed motoring, he crashed on his motorbike racing along the roads of Dorset in May of 1935.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

Despite their visibility or even star power, air elites like Roe, Vickers or Lawrence did not always openly declare their fascism or pro-fascist leanings. They certainly made their views on economics or armaments known, but often hid their direct associations with Britain's fascists. But, one prominent woman, who would play a very visible role in Britain's air community, was anything but reticent about her admiration for fascism. She was Lady Lucy Houston. Though she was no engineer, she was the country's most generous donor and most vocal supporter of British aviation. She was not born into wealth, but was a dance hall chorus girl in her youth. She married twice before the First World War, which left her with a generous pension which she used in her work in the suffragette movement. In 1924 she married the wealthy M. P. and shipping magnate Sir Robert Houston. The two were eventually forced to live on the island of Jersey as tax exiles until the death of Sir Robert. Upon his demise, Lady Houston settled a price with the British Government to return home, where she lived on her yacht, the *Liberty*, until her own death in 1936.

Lady Houston was an outspoken critic of the Government throughout the interwar years. She vilified the Labour party as the greatest threat to the British nation. But, she also criticized the Conservatives for their willingness to accommodate and their selection of Stanley Baldwin whom she could not abide. She purchased the *Saturday Review* during the 1920's and used it as a mouth piece for her almost hysterical extreme right viewpoints. She routinely attacked Ramsay MacDonald, once "exposing" his war record in print, which got the *Saturday Review* banned for a short period. She saw Communist Russia as the greatest threat to world civilization, and was aghast that Britain had elected a Labour Government in 1929 (albeit without a clear parliamentary majority), with its Marxist affinities. Meanwhile, Baldwin was "trying to convert

Socialism into a pale Liberalism, thereby watering down Conservative principles,”¹¹⁷ which outraged her all the more.

Increasingly she turned to fascism as the best form of government for the modern situation. During the twenties and early thirties she openly celebrated Mussolini as the finest statesman in the world. She believed that Mussolini’s Fascist regime had found the magic formula to end class war, to bring back nationalism, and to secure Europe against Bolshevism. She regularly published complimentary articles, but also allowed Mussolini and other Fascist writers space to air their views directly to the British public. She even named the little dog she carried around, Benito, after the Duce. She was less enthusiastic about Hitler. The pages of the *Saturday Review* are not at all complimentary of the Nazis until after 1934, when she apparently began to warm up to National Socialism. After this point she was a clear pro-Nazi.¹¹⁸ Britain’s own fascist movement intrigued her and she was a clear supporter early on. Social issues, however, intervened. Lady Houston was impressed with Mosley and the BUF and even included a full double page spread with a professional portrait of Mosley at his desk; underneath, the caption read, “Sir Oswald Mosley – The English Fascist Leader who is daily gathering more and more disciples.” On the opposite page ran an abbreviated synopsis of the BUF manifesto under the headline, “Our Policy – Britain First!”¹¹⁹ Houston was anxious to meet Mosley and negotiate with him regarding her own personal funding of his party, and had even commented to a friend that she would provide a staggering 200,000 pounds. An article in Mosley’s press, however,

¹¹⁷ J. Wentworth Day, Lady Houston D. B. E.: The Woman who Won the War. (London: Allen Wingate, 1958), p.198.

¹¹⁸ Richard Griffiths, Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-1939. (London: Constable, 1980), pp. 234-6.

¹¹⁹ *The Saturday Review*, February 10, 1934, p. 154-156.

poked fun at Lady Houston's grammar as well as her newspaper. She was furious and wrote a letter to Mosley demanding some kind of action and an apology. Instead, said Wentworth Day, her assistant and quasi-biographer, "His answer was an unhumorous lecture. 'Teaching me to suck eggs!' she fumed. That ended Mosley's chance of getting 200,000 pounds."¹²⁰ Although her personal differences with Mosley and his organization prevented collaboration, the opinions and policies circulated in her newspaper were very similar to those of the BUF, though not as clearly defined.

After attacking and embarrassing the Government, Lady Houston's other prime objective was to make Britain, "First in the Air." As the 1930's progressed, the central message of the *Saturday Review* increasingly became her cry for British air defense to be greatly increased. Her outrage at the vulnerability of Britain to air attack was very often the lead story. The following pages were generally filled with appeals to the British state to bolster the nation's technological developments of all kinds, but most especially in aviation. The two certainly went hand in hand, and Lady Houston was adamant that the state had to take a far greater role in assisting private enterprise to bolster Britain's aviation industry. From this obsession grew the event that was to make her a household name for a time and position her in the popular mind as "the Fairy Godmother of the RAF."¹²¹

In 1931 Britain's aviation community was preparing for the upcoming air tournament known as the "Schneider Cup." It was an air race, which used timing instead of head-to-head competition to identify the fastest plane over multiple runs. By the early 1930's the Schneider Cup had emerged as the most prestigious air contest in Europe. Aircraft companies and national

¹²⁰ Day, *Lady Houston*, p. 157.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

squads struggled to produce machines and pilots to gain the glory and notoriety that victory would bring—along with enhanced reputations and greater production orders. That year, however, the struggling Labour Government elected not to fund a British effort in the Schneider Cup. The designers from the Rolls Royce engine Company estimated 100,000 pounds as necessary for the design and production of a special model for the race. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Phillip Snowden, however, was laboring mightily for a balanced budget in the midst of an economic slump with an unemployment figure of nearly three million. Social benefits were eventually cut, which would lead to the dissolution of Labour’s Government and the creation of the National Government. One can see why such funding was cut, given the crisis. But to aviation enthusiasts it was a national disgrace from a small-minded, backward thinking lot who could not see the absolute necessity of Britain’s leadership in modern technology. What made it especially galling was that Britain had won the trophy twice before, and if it could somehow win a third time, Britain would have earned the right to keep the trophy permanently. The business implications of a victory were also plain to see, said aviation correspondents, as were the implications of a humiliating loss— or worse, non-participation. Beaverbrook’s *Sunday Express* wrote, “the Air Ministry intend to leave the task of defending the Schneider Trophy to private enterprise. If they carry out this intention, then Great Britain will inevitably lose the world’s emblem of air supremacy...Enough thousands can surely be saved from the weekly financial waste in this country...to give us a dominant position in the air from the start of the “Flying Age.”¹²² Lord Rothermere’s *Daily Mail* was even more adamant emphasizing that modern element that surfaced so often in extreme right discourse— the material and symbolic

¹²² *Sunday Express*, June 22, 1930, quoted in Day, p. 59.

importance of speed. The editorial ran under the headline, “If we Let the Schneider Trophy Go, Aeroplane Trade will Go Too.”

No other action of the Socialist Government has provoked such complete contempt as its refusal to allow Great Britain to compete for the Schneider Trophy this year – to defend the proud position which British pilots and machines have won as speed champions of the air...Great Britain won this trophy for the second time in succession when Flight Lieutenant HRD Waghorn of the RAF, flying above the eyes of all the world, attained the speed of 331 mph. One more victory this year and the Trophy would be ours for all time, as an abiding memorial of British supremacy in the air...British trade would gain enormously from the victory. British aviation no less. Success would be an advertisement for the British aircraft industry which has established itself as the greatest of its kind in the world...Mr. Snowden is prepared to give nearly 100,000 pounds for Grand Opera, but not a penny for British prestige in the air, even though whatever is spent on that be returned ten times over in trade orders.¹²³

At this point Lord Semphill, one of Britain’s most celebrated pilots and a far right political ally, approached Lady Houston about the dilemma. She was quite sympathetic to his overtures, given her passion for air supremacy and, as she recognized, the potential to publicly humiliate MacDonald’s Government. She eventually agreed to fund the design, production and staff for the team, paying out 100,000 pounds. The assembled team of engineers, led by R.J. Mitchell, eventually produced a customized Vickers Supermarine S1596 sea plane with a Rolls-Royce engine in time for the competition. The machine and its crew did not disappoint. It won the head-to-head speed competition against all comers. Secondly, however, the Schneider team staged a special run to make an attempt at the world speed record, with a specialist pilot, George Stainforth at the controls. Again, the British team was successful. Stainforth and the Supermarine set three new world speed records over four separate runs, with the top speed established at 404.265 miles an hour. The Schneider Trophy was awarded to Great Britain for all time.

¹²³ *Daily Mail*, January 23, 1931, quoted in Day, p. 59-60.



Lady Houston at the Schneider Cup races in 1931. She had funded the British design team for the international competition which broke several air speed records. That day she would break another barrier of her own, having tea in the prestigious dining room of the Royal Yacht Club – even the Queen had never done it.

When the competition was complete and the celebrations began, Lady Houston again let her “modernity” show. The team assembled for tea in the nearby Royal Yacht Squadron Club House, which was, as Day described it, “the most exclusive club house in the world...from which all women are barred!”¹²⁴ Yet, surrounded by the pilots, engineers and officers of the RAF, she walked with them all right into the club house and took her seat, something that even the Queen of England did not attempt. The stunned staff could hardly stop the celebration in the midst of a national triumph and in the presence of such an array of authority. Day tells us that Lady Houston was quite unaware of the situation. But, we should remember that Lady Houston had certainly not come from old wealth, and had once been a dedicated member of the suffragette movement. She may well have been conscious of the moment and delighted in it.

Whatever the motives or results of her possibly feminist gesture at the Royal Yacht Club, the results of the Schneider Cup were real enough. Britain certainly enjoyed a boost to its prestige, but more importantly, the design of the Supermarine seaplane would have a profound effect on future aircraft design. The chief engineer for the project was Reginald J. Mitchell of Vickers (Supermarine branch), generally acknowledged as Britain’s greatest aircraft designer of the era. Mitchell would build on his Schneider Cup design later when Supermarine was given a government contract to develop a high speed fighter plane. The result would be the Supermarine Spitfire, probably the most important aircraft in Britain’s miraculous victory in the Battle of Britain. It is said that in the years following the Schneider Trophy races, that RAF planes which flew past Lady Houston’s yacht always dipped a wing in salute to the *grand dame* of British aviation.

¹²⁴ Day, Lady Houston, p. 67.

Down below, on her yacht, Lady Houston was busy harrying her editors as they continued to try to brow-beat and shame the Government into expanding and modernizing Britain's air forces. Lady Houston's continuous campaigns for national defense and her sponsoring of the first flight over Mount Everest will be addressed in subsequent chapters. But, her *Saturday Review* also continued to campaign for new competitions like the Schneider Trophy to stimulate Britain's air community. After 1931, the Schneider races were discontinued and no great British or international competition emerged to take its place. Delighted with the results of the 1931 tournament and doubtless her own notoriety as a result, Lady Houston and her columnists campaigned for the creation of new races. The Government needed to step in, said her air correspondent R. G. Montgomery, to create an environment of continuous competition which would spur innovation.

The first great need is for a stimulus which shall continually urge forward our technical workers and others; which shall keep them perpetually in the state of being dissatisfied and of wanting a little more – whether it be in the performance of the aeroplanes or in the swiftness with which they may be built. Now no better stimulus has been devised than the great international air race. The Royal Air Force today would be in a sorry plight had it not been for the Schneider Trophy races. They afforded the stimulus which sent our technologists in search of new things and our mechanics and pilots of search of new experiences. There are no more Schneider Trophy races, it is true; but there is no reason why something should not be *devised and supported by the Government* to take their place...With some kind of aerial equivalent to the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece, technical development would be continually stimulated and a large fund of advanced knowledge would be accumulated. Air-mindedness can best be developed by encouraging the flying clubs and schools by *extending the present system of subsidies*.¹²⁵

Lady Houston and the “air-minded” of the extreme right abhorred socialism and believed in private enterprise. But they were convinced that the state was obligated to involve itself deeply in areas that carried vital levels of social capital, like the nation's air industry. Increasingly, after

¹²⁵ R. G. Montgomery, “Our Future in the Air” *Saturday Review*, November 23, 1935, p. 491.

1931, Lady Houston looked to Rome and Berlin for examples of state-directed capitalism that produced technological progress on a national scale and for the national welfare.

Finally, we cannot fail to mention Harold Sidney Harmsworth, later the first Viscount Rothermere. He was to be one of the most famous and most vocal of the extreme right community in Britain and a stubborn champion of modernizing Britain. Rothermere was born into relative obscurity in Victorian London to parents of quite modest means. His father, Alfred, was an aspiring, but unsuccessful writer and an alcoholic. The family lived constantly on the financial edge and memories of the family's poverty would haunt Rothermere into adulthood.¹²⁶ Rothermere's elder brother Alfred, however, was by far the more famous of the two. Alfred Harmsworth, who eventually became Lord Northcliffe, was one of the great pioneers in print media and would eventually create the empire that Rothermere would come to control. Northcliffe developed a completely new style of newspaper with dozens of short pieces of news and gossip together as opposed to the old fashioned style of long-winded hard news stories. He pioneered things like write-in contests and the "funny papers," which created an entirely new audience for the newspaper. With his populist approach, and genius for understanding what the masses actually wanted, Northcliffe is often credited with inventing the "modern" newspaper. The *London Daily Mail* became his center-piece for the new journalistic style.

Alfred's younger brother, Harold, had none of the elder boy's literary bent or his natural facility with marketing. Rather, Harold, grew to be a whiz with figures and finances and was working in a civil service job, when his elder brother came calling. The young Northcliffe begged Harold to join him in launching his first publications and Harold, taking an immense risk

¹²⁶ S. J. Taylor tells the story of Rothermere being served a fish dinner once and bursting into tears at the sight of it. When composed, he explained that during his childhood his family had lived on the fish for months at a time in terrible poverty. See S. J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), p. 6.

to his career, accepted. Thereafter, the pattern emerged: Northcliffe would come up with the grand ideas, publicity stunts or merger propositions, while Harold would carefully assess their financial potential. Together they repeatedly bought unprofitable papers and re-styled them for a “mass” market. The formula certainly worked as the two brothers rose from abject poverty to owning the largest print combine in Britain, Associated Newspapers.

Northcliffe had been an almost fanatical air enthusiast, attending air shows, sponsoring races, and had even sponsored the competition that A. V. Roe had won in 1907. Harold (made Lord Rothermere in 1921) was just as avid. His interest as well as his government connections resulted in his being asked to become Britain’s first Minister for Air during the First World War. Rothermere stayed in the position, however, only a short time. Almost immediately after taking the position of Britain’s first Air Minister, news came of the death of two of his three sons. Rothermere was understandably shattered by their death. The family “feared a complete breakdown.” Rothermere resigned his position, understanding that he simply lacked the energy and focus required, and generally lost interest for anything as he mourned. His eldest son Vyvyan’s letters, from hospital, reveal that the young man was disgusted with the pointlessness of the slaughter and the ineptitude of his commanders. At one point he wrote, “I do not mind having been wounded three times, but I hate to think that I have been muddled three times.”¹²⁷ It is clear from his writing and career in subsequent years that Rothermere was devastated and that he would do anything in his power to prevent another senseless war. Furthermore, Rothermere appears to have absorbed Vyvyan’s cynicism and lost his confidence in Britain’s politicians.

Northcliffe died in 1922 leaving Rothermere in charge of their media empire, which he used to promote his own far right political ideas. In the late 1920’s he joined forces with another

¹²⁷ Letter from Vyvyan Harmsworth to Harold Harmsworth, quoted in Taylor, p. 194.



Lord Rothermere with Htler, Ca. late 1930's. Rothermere used the profits from a cigarette marketing venture to fund the BUF in its early years and formerly supported it through his *Daily Mail*. Later, he would help design the high speed bomber, the *Britain First!* and found the National League of Airmen.

press lord, Lord Beaverbrook, to create a new political party. Both Rothermere and Beaverbrook believed that Britain's plodding economy could benefit greatly from protection. A closed imperial economy, along the lines of Joseph Chamberlain's "imperial preference," protected by high tariffs in the colonies, could protect and resuscitate British manufacturing, they believed. Their party, which will be reviewed more thoroughly in Chapter Six, went nowhere, however, and Rothermere turned to other political alternatives. Throughout the 1930's Rothermere promoted and endorsed Fascism in Italy, Nazi Germany, as well as Mosley's BUF. He used his *Daily Mail* as his principal voice for enunciating his increasingly extreme right agenda. His views had congealed to include a belief in authoritarian government's ability to deal with the pressing crises of the modern world, a loss of confidence in liberal democracy, and certainly a belief that government had to be involved in the key projects to modernize Britain. He sent a special correspondent, G. Ward Price, to cover the Nazi regime in Berlin in 1933. From that point until the approach of war, the *Daily Mail* ran regular features on the apparent progress and energy of the new Germany. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Rothermere also helped fund the BUF, and openly supported Mosley until late summer of 1934. But, having ceased to be a mouthpiece for the BUF in that year, the *Daily Mail* remained clearly pro-fascist in its views right up to 1939.

In addition to its tacit endorsement of fascism, the *Daily Mail* was also concerned with pushing Britain forward in terms of technology and industry. It ran regular columns on radio broadcasting, and featured the famous Sir Malcolm Campbell as its motoring columnist in a regular feature. The paper was also used to trumpet Rothermere's views on the importance of the aircraft industry to Britain's national security. This would become rather an obsession of Rothermere's and lead to regular press campaigns like "Britain Needs 5,000 Airplanes!" But,

Rothermere would not stop at writing lengthy editorial pieces. The man who had been Britain's first Air Minister, albeit for a very short time, would also launch the construction of a high-speed bomber plane, and create the National League of Airmen. These campaigns and organizations will figure prominently in the chapters to come as will Rothermere's continuous fight to make democratic politicians take technology seriously and to move Britain forward into the modern age.

Radio Communications

Radio broadcasting was another area of new technology that the extreme right community watched with great interest. The great outlets of the extreme right press covered broadcasting regularly and were often deeply critical of the government's policies regarding radio. The criticisms were aimed generally at two areas—the stunted growth of Britain's radio industry due to the restrictive BBC monopoly, and the supposedly indifferent content that was going out over the airwaves. Those areas will be more thoroughly investigated in Chapter Four which examines technology and the extreme right's attack on democracy.

This chapter is concerned with identifying key members of the high-tech community in Britain who had strong connections to extreme right politics. In the area of radio broadcasting, one person above all stood out in this regard, and that was Peter Eckersley, British radio's most important technical pioneer. Peter Pendleton Eckersley was born in January 1892 in Puebla Mexico to a middle class family. His father, a railway construction engineer, was in Mexico to help build the Grand Mexican Railway. Upon their return to England, it soon became clear that Peter had inherited his father's engineering gifts, and his first love was the cutting edge technology of wireless. Eckersley was in on the ground floor of the new technology earning a position as the technician and on-air broadcaster for Britain's first broadcasting radio station out

of tiny Chelmsford in Essex. Working in that capacity he would become the first regular broadcaster over Britain's air waves. When the British Government took steps to avoid the "Americanization" of British industries after the First World War, they created a protected monopoly for a state-sponsored radio service, the British Broadcasting Company Ltd. This name would be changed to the famous British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1927. Eckersley was hired in 1922 and for the next seven years acted as its chief engineer. He was responsible for establishing the basic technical infrastructure of the BBC and earned several patents in the process.

Eckersley was fired from the BBC, however, in 1929. The generally acknowledged reason for his termination was his divorce from his first wife. The Director of the BBC at the time was Sir John Reith, who was reputed to be puritanically moral and could not tolerate a scandal at the nascent company. Eckersley, however, was convinced that he had been terminated for other reasons and that the divorce simply made for a convenient pretense. Eckersley had been a "maverick" at the BBC, with strong willed ideas and an inability to get along with those who could not grasp his vision. He despised the Oxbridge types that filled the offices of the BBC and longed for practical engineering types. He was disappointed; the managerial culture endured at the BBC and he departed.

During the years that followed, Eckersley would dabble in various radio schemes which challenged the BBC's monopoly hold on the ears of Britain. It would appear his resentment for the BBC never left him.¹²⁸ His affiliations included General Electric, EMI, and the International Broadcasting Company, which attempted to create a radio station in France to challenge the BBC from a safe distance. He also, during these years, conceived of an entirely different technical

¹²⁸ See Peter Eckersley, The Power Behind the Microphone (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941).

format for radio broadcasting. From 1933 to 1936 he put together the basic diagrams and devices for the broadcasting of radio over wires. He envisioned a central programming center which would be connected to sub-stations all over Britain and from which consumers would be able to plug in various cables into their sets in order to pick up a multitude of radio channels. The communications community saw “Wired Wireless” as absurd and Eckersley never gained any meaningful support for his idea. And, it must be said, given the technology available at the time it would seem to be an irrational and cost prohibitive alternative. But, of course, in Britain Eckersley was shut out of the only institution for radio technology that existed and so the production of an alternative technology was the only way for him to re-enter the game. Eckersley was nothing if not a visionary, with his eyes fixed on the future. He wrote at length in his semi-autobiographical attack on the BBC, The Power Behind the Microphone, of that vision.

I have a dream about the future. I see the interior of a living-room...the conditioned air is fresh and warm. Old-fashioned people would feel uncomfortable without the fire and fireplace, others might miss the raucous brown box we used to call the “wireless.” But flush against the wall there is a translucent screen with numbered strips of lettering running across it. The lettering spells out titles which read like newspaper headlines. These are the titles describing the many different “broadcasting” programmes which can be heard by just pressing the corresponding button...there is an advertising group which offers me “The Tale of Little Red Drum” (Tobacco Hour), and Horlick’s Current Affairs Debate...Television programs are set apart. I can, if I like, see the repeat of an old favorite, “The Importance of Being Ernest” or “Centre Court Men’s Semi-finals, Wimbledon.” Not bad for a summer evening at six o’clock...Of course it is only a dream, but not so completely fantastic as some might imagine. It could all be done by using wires rather than wireless to distribute programmes. Let a cable, no thicker than a man’s finger, be laid along the streets, outside the houses, and the main part of the installation is completed. The cable would only contain two or three conductors and tappings would be made onto these for branch feeders to bring the service into the houses. The branch ends in the houses would be connected to house receivers. The street cables would be taken to transmitters which would inject programmes into them.¹²⁹

His technological and cultural vision has, of course, generally come true in the form of cable television, complete with astounding programming choices and (perhaps unfortunately), the

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 195-196.

corporate sponsorship. Eckersley was another of the frustrated technological visionaries we often encounter in this study whose outsider status, it would seem, was related to their eventual link with extreme politics.

In the 1930's Eckersley became a strong supporter of Oswald Mosley and was the principal technical consultant in Mosley's project to create his own radio network. The idea was to locate radio broadcasting stations in one or several locations across Europe and/or the Channel islands. These stations, then, not under the jurisdiction of the British government, could broadcast strong enough signals to cover Britain and avoid the BBC monopoly enforced within Britain's borders. According to documents in Mosley's personal business papers, Eckersley was to be the chief technical consultant for the new company set up for this purpose, Air Time Ltd. To gain access to governments in Europe (specifically Luxembourg, Leichtenstein, and Nationalist Spain), Eckersley tried to gain employment by these governments as technical consultant for starting their own broadcasting stations. Once hired, he would be in perfect position to assist Mosley's concern getting established in those locations.¹³⁰ Once in place, said Eckersley, Mosley's broadcasts would occupy "various combinations of bands" or channels with different varieties of programming and Britain would have for the first time multi-channel radio.¹³¹ Mosley later wrote of his attempt to change the communications industry and mold the future.

My plan was to compete directly with the existing radio-advertising stations in Normandy and Luxembourg by serving the British market from West, South, and East... Thus from at least two sides, and we hoped three, we should have bombarded the British advertising market. Our radio competitors would have had no chance against us; yet in the development of this immense industry there was plenty of room for all before we reached anything approaching a scale comparable to the Americans... After a deep study of the radio advertising business I devised certain entirely new principles not only in radio

¹³⁰ Peter Eckersley, "Radio Position – Appreciation of the Situation" Memorandum, April 22, 1938, Mosley Papers, OMN/B/6/3/28.

¹³¹ Peter Eckersley, "Asymmetric Sideband" Mosley Papers, OMN/B/6/3/29

advertising, but in commerce and advertising, which I am confident, would have entirely revolutionized, present methods and immensely increased profits... One thing at least is certain, that but for the accident of War we should have made an immense fortune.¹³²

Precisely what those marketing ideas were that would have revolutionized commercial radio we don't know. But, it is certain from the records that Eckersley was the key technical visionary for the entire venture. Mosley sent his wife to Germany from 1937 through 1938 to use her unique relationship with Hitler to try and get the German concession for his radio venture. She was miserable in these negotiations and was put off for many months. But, eventually she was successful in securing the Fuhrer's permission for Air Time's establishment there. But, by that time the coming of war made it unrealistic. Mosley had conceived the project as part of his desperate need to secure funding. By 1937 Rothermere's direct support was long gone, membership dues were drastically reduced, and Italian assistance had ceased. In those circumstances Mosley was spending a great deal of his own fortune and needed to secure another revenue stream for the party. But, aside from the commercial aspect of radio, Mosley doubtless understood the power of propaganda. He was denied the opportunity to broadcast his speeches on the BBC and sought another formula to ride the air waves.

As war drew nearer Eckersley was actually recruited by the government to help in the war effort, while his second wife, Dorothy, entered a darker chapter of broadcasting. Although rather estranged by this point, Dorothy and Peter were both pro-fascists. Dorothy, however, remained a staunch supporter of Germany right through the outbreak of war. She and Peter eventually divorced and she subsequently took their son and set up residence in Berlin. In Berlin she began to make occasional pro-Nazi broadcasts into Britain. In this radio program she joined some of the most notorious figures of Britain's extreme right. William Joyce, former BUF member and

¹³² Oswald Mosley, Draft manuscript, "Air Time 1937-8-9," OMN/B/6/3/30.



Peter Eckersley, Ca. 1920's. Eckersley was the BBC's first Chief Engineer and established the basic engineering for Britain's first broadcast radio. He became an avid follower of Mosley and was the key figure in attempting to establish a BUF broadcast radio network to rival the BBC from the continent.

founder of the National Socialist League, left for Germany and began conducting regular broadcasts to dampen British morale. He became infamous as “Lord Haw-Haw” and after the war was executed for treason.

Other Notables

There were some other notable members of the extreme right community who were important figures in the world of science and technology, though their careers do not fit neatly under the categories of “Auto,” “Air,” and “Radio.” The first of this group was the naval officer, Admiral Sir Barry Domvile. Domvile had enjoyed a very distinguished career in the Royal Navy, serving as an Assistant in the Imperial Defense Department, and commanding both cruisers and destroyers during the Great War. After the War he would Command a battleship, the Third Cruiser Squadron, and was named Director of Naval Intelligence. His last years saw him named President of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, a post he seems to have enjoyed a great deal, lecturing regularly on the subjects close to his heart. He was at Greenwich from 1932 to 1934, at which time he was named Admiral and “retired” by the Service. According to his diaries, the retirement was not necessarily his choice, and it seems he was forced out, even if diplomatically.¹³³

As we have seen with Londonderry, Eckersley and others, Domvile was now an outsider who had spent his career in the middle of the action; and who had been rejected by the institution to which he had been wholly committed. He was a close friend and regular correspondent with many in the far right community like J. F. C. Fuller (with whom he dined regularly) and G. Ward Price. He was a strong admirer of Nazi Germany and his diaries reveal his fierce anti-

¹³³ Domvile Diaries, DM/51, March, 1934.

Semitism.¹³⁴ As was becoming fashionable, he sent his son to Germany in 1935 for a tour of the new Nazi state, and soon followed him on a journey of his own. He was given the customary tour of Nazi Germany and was even invited to the 1936 Nuremburg Rally as a guest of Hermann Goering. He returned with very favorable impressions, which he wrote about in his book By and Large (1936). His admiration eventually led him to membership in the Anglo-German Fellowship and later he would found and direct the notoriously pro-Nazi organization, the Link. He spent the late 1930's advocating the modernization and re-engineering of Britain's naval fleet. He was determined to see Britain's new ships engineered to be smaller and swifter, getting away from the massive Battleships of the day. His other great political crusade was as a leading exponent of the "fuel from coal" campaign. This was an effort by several on the far right to solve the coal crisis and insulate Britain by rejecting foreign oil supplies. The alternative would be to further develop the scientific processes (which already existed) to extract petroleum from coal. So his principle political advocacy revolved around technical and scientific issues.

As the 1930's drew to a close he became an increasingly convinced fascist and put his faith in Mosley as the true savior for Britain. When the War began, his visible links to the BUF and his own organization, the Link, made him highly suspect to British authorities. He was jailed in the 18b internments and held until the end of the War. After the War he published his own explanation of his tragedy in a book titled, From Admiral to Cabin Boy. The book is not much more than a rant against British politicians and a supposed Jewish conspiracy, which he blamed for his imprisonment. It seems he learned nothing from his experiences. His immense unpublished diaries are now in the archives of the Maritime Museum in Greenwich and are a

¹³⁴ See Domvile Diaries, DM/56, April, 1938.

valuable source for tracking the activities of Britain's pro-Nazi community in the days just before war erupted.

Another member of the Link was the eminent professor of chemistry, Arthur Pillans Laurie. Laurie's specialty was the chemical properties of pigmentation and color, most usually that of painting. His work in chemical analysis produced breakthroughs that allowed the true age of old paintings to be quite accurately assessed. He also introduced infra-red photography into the process which had the power to reveal older layers underneath. Laurie was first a lecturer in chemistry and physics at St. Mary's Hospital and Medical School, and later held the chair in chemistry at the Royal Academy of Arts. His academic career reached its peak when he was named principal of Heriot-Watt College in Edinburgh in 1900.

Laurie's involvement with the extreme right took some time to emerge. His early political leanings were with the Liberal party, and he seems to have stuck with them even into the 1930's. He published his first political tract in 1934, entitled Pictures and Politics, which was half autobiography and half an exposition of his politics. At that time he was still clearly a believer in rigorous free trade, far the exception for those on the extreme right. But, above all he was a believer in David Lloyd-George. His faith in Lloyd-George apparently trumped his belief in free trade as he lauded the Welshman's 1929 platform for Keynesian economics and public works. By the end of the 1930's Laurie had become an enthusiastic admirer of Nazism. He joined Domvile's Link and in 1939 published his last book, The Case for Germany, for which Domvile wrote the foreword. In his book, which had to be published in Berlin, Laurie laid out his rather confused view of why the fascist nations had been pressed to the point of war. Clinging to his old views on free trade, Laurie explained that it was the powerful nations with the majority of natural resources like Britain, France and the United States which had squeezed smaller nations

like Italy and Germany. Cutting off their access to the world economy, he said, these nations had forced Germany into autarky and military expansion. Laurie faded into obscurity during the war and died in 1949.

Another high profile scientist involved in the pro-fascist cause was Derek Ainslie Jackson, Britain's leading spectroscopist. Spectroscopy is the study of electromagnetic radiation and its relationship to matter. Jackson's scientific career was very distinguished, and included the first observation of the "hyperfine structure" of the cesium atom. Jackson was able to ascertain the structure by mathematical calculations, which gave him the "value for the inverse cube of the distance from the nucleus to the electron," and made him a highly sought after young mind. He graduated from Cambridge in 1924 and proceeded to a research position at Clarendon College Oxford, where he worked until the War. During the Second World War he was the chief researcher of infra-red technologies and would do crucial work in the area of radar detection. He was a very visible member of the Royal Society and at the end of his life he was the Chairman of the European Group for Atomic Spectroscopy.¹³⁵

Jackson's relationship with the extreme right may well have been more a matter of social ties than genuine political convictions. As a young man he had fallen under the spell of the Mitford family during the 1930's. He spent a great deal of time with the famous sisters and would eventually marry Pamela Mitford. During the early 1930's it was openly known that Diana Mitford (at that time Diana Guinness) was having an intense affair with Sir Oswald Mosley. Diana eventually divorced Brian Guinness and married Mosley in 1936. Their wedding was a secret ceremony (to protect Diana from scandal) that took place in the living room of Joseph

¹³⁵ See B. Bleaney, "Derek Ainslie Jackson (1906-1982): Some Recollections of a Great European Spectroscopist," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (May 2001), pp. 285-287.

Goebbels with Hitler in attendance. Diana was the Fuhrer's particular favorite, along with her sister Unity, representing to him the ideal of Aryan beauty. Jackson appears to have been taken with Diana as well as the other sisters. In a recently released book of the Mitford sisters' letters, the editor Charlotte Mosley comments that Jackson was "in love with most of them, including Tom (their brother). Pamela was the sister most readily available and he proposed to her."¹³⁶ Given Jackson's new familial relationship, once they had married, he had access to the inner circle of the Leader, Mosley, and became a close supporter.

It would appear, however, that his support did not extend to the overt anti-Semitism that was to characterize the BUF after 1934. When Professor Heini Kuhn arrived at Oxford as a refugee from the Nazis in 1933 he was quite apprehensive about working with Jackson. Kuhn said that "phrases like 'almost a fascist' and 'friend of Mosley' sounded rather alarming to someone just escaped from Hitler's Germany." But, he wrote, "Next day, when I met Jackson, my worries soon vanished."¹³⁷

When the extreme right community is surveyed there appears a remarkably large, even disproportionate, number of its key members who were associated with the new generation of modern technologies. Some of these were on the fringe of that political tendency, but certainly a significant number were crucial to the organizations and the shaping of the far right ideology. They provided vital funding and some founded key organizations. Some spoke out regularly for monetary reform. Others were part of the inner circle of British fascism and many were visible exponents of the extreme right wing in the press and in a great many books.

¹³⁶ Charlotte Mosley, ed. The Mitfords: Letters Between Six Sisters. (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 35.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

In examining the lives, careers and writing of these figures some important common themes emerge. First, their language suggested an intellectual link between the power of technology and the power of authoritarian government. Airplanes, race cars, or battleships were giant, powerful and lethal. With the new technologies, one could wipe away the old and obsolete. This could take the form of speed records, higher altitudes, or record distance flying. High technology also regularly showed up the ineffectiveness of old models. Extreme right figures often used the same language in describing their technological agendas as they did in describing their political beliefs. Fascist government was swift, powerful, and dangerous. It could produce decisive action and obliterate old obstacles. This link was never made obviously explicit, but it was expressed in a recurring set of metaphorical images. As we shall see in the following chapters, which dissect extreme right discourse, this group used technological metaphor to describe their own ideals and the obsolescence of parliamentary democracy. They described the dictators in terms that suggested a competent pilot at the controls of state. They portrayed fascism as a gleaming steel wall impervious to outside assault. They described mechanized warfare as the metaphor for the modern world struggle. Just as often they described liberal-democracy as an out of date model, or as a poorly planned highway – leading nowhere.

Next, the majority of the figures above came from humble origins and had to rely almost entirely upon their own hard work and enterprise to make their way in the world. Despite some having achieved titled status (such as Lord Nuffield, Lord Rothermere, Sir A. V. Roe, Sir Malcolm Campbell, Lady Houston), their opinions remained, for the most part, those of “self-made” people. This could often show itself in their resentment of more traditional British elites. Nuffield and Eckersley, among others, were quite open in their contempt for the Oxbridge class who cultivated a more refined managerial culture and stood for traditional social networks and

privileges. They believed instead in the importance of the producer and the worthiness of invention, innovation and proficient engineering. Conversely, they saw the power of financial elites to determine and control the manufacturer as perverted—and any system that would allow it as out-dated. Their fervent “productivism” did not mix well with the “gentlemanly capitalism” of the City or the boardroom and as such they often found themselves outsiders. In addition to out and out class issues, they also represented stark technological modernity amongst an elite class who often thought of technology and grimy industry as distasteful and beneath them.¹³⁸

Finally, this group was characteristically driven by the very modern motivation to constantly “push the envelope” in their particular fields of endeavor. As we have seen, the extreme right included Britain’s first (and most daring) aviators. Industrialists like Nuffield were driven to produce cars more and more cheaply. Campbell was obsessed with shattering the land speed records and did so an amazing seven times. When he had broken 300 mph on land he turned to boats and broke the water speed record. Rothermere campaigned for and Lady Houston funded Britain’s Schneider Cup team which defended Britain’s international honor and broke the air speed records. Later, as we will see in Chapter Six, Lady Houston sponsored the first flights over Everest to break the barriers of high-altitude flying. Obsessed with breaking away from the confines of old equipment and old standards, they routinely strove to go faster, higher, and further into new frontiers. This tendency was reflected in their political discourse where they, often stridently, pushed for a new society and a supposedly more modern formula of government. We shall see these characteristics reveal themselves again and again in the following pages.

¹³⁸ See Martin Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

CHAPTER FOUR

“HITLER’S WONDERLAND”

Technology, Engineering and Admiration for Fascism Abroad

From the time of Mussolini’s consolidation of his regime after 1925, Britons on the far right began to travel regularly to fascist countries to see the dictatorships for themselves. After Hitler took power in 1933, a number of British observers went to assess the controversial world of Nazism, sometimes invited by Nazi officials, sometimes on their own out of curiosity. They produced a vast collection of books, articles, and journals all devoted to describing Italy and Germany and their new fascist identities. By the middle of the 1930’s, it was becoming customary for well-to-do British social and political sympathizers to visit the “New Germany” or to send their children. As part of a calculated state effort to improve relations with Britain, they were often hosted by image-conscious Germans anxious to show off their country at its Nazi best. These British visitors generally “returned from their pilgrimages bubbling over with enthusiasm.”¹³⁹ By 1938, after the Munich Conference and as war seemed to be approaching, these accounts began to take on a more desperate tone. They blended travel writing with insistent pleas for alliance and understanding in order to avoid war. Along these lines, they also repeatedly stressed the natural affinities they found between Britons, Germans, and Italians.

Among the common threads of this literary genre is the very prominent place of technological modernity and engineering. The authors spent a great deal of time describing their factory tours, inspecting labor conditions, and investigating the new fascist engineering projects. What impressed a number of them was the intensity with which the fascist nations were plunging into

¹³⁹ Lynn Olson Troublesome Young Men (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp.68-71.

the new world of science and industry. As the Conservative M.P. Arnold Wilson wrote of the Exhibition of German Life and Work, “I have seen most of the Great Exhibitions of the last 20 years, but none like this...bustling with *new ideas, new life, new methods!*”¹⁴⁰ Their conclusions were generally that Italy and Germany had become exemplary “modern” nations with both the individual leadership and the political system to forge ahead into the new world. The culture of new technology and the visual power of massive engineering projects convinced them that fascism was uniquely equipped to master modernity. Simultaneously, these foreign accomplishments seemed to highlight the fading efficacy and relevance of Britain’s liberal democracy.

The Dictator at the Controls

Several far right commentators who wrote magazine articles, newspaper editorials, travel logs, or political tracts began their praise for international fascism by lauding the dictators themselves. This adulation often included the notion that Mussolini and Hitler were truly “modern” men, and this was reflected in their embrace of science and technology. Each was seen to be well-informed and enthusiastic about new technologies and to have a positive agenda for including them in the modernizing of their respective nations.

Their views of the dictators, however, had their differences. While these authors saw Hitler as a dreamy visionary, they depicted Mussolini as the ultimate in efficient, no-nonsense administration. He was often described as impatiently eliminating red tape and bureaucratic obstacles. Mosley wrote in Rothermere’s *Daily Mail* of his visit to Rome in 1932:

A visit to Mussolini...is typical of that new atmosphere. No time is wasted in the polite banalities which have so irked the younger generation in Britain when dealing with our elder statesmen. The talk is neither of the beauty of the Italian sunsets nor of the

¹⁴⁰ Sir Arnold Wilson, “Germany in May,” *The English Review*, p. 692, (undated clipping from the Papers of Captain H.W. Luttman-Johson, HL-J11).

sweetness of the birds singing in the gooseberry bushes... Questions on all relevant and practical subjects are fired with the rapidity and precision of bullets from a machine gun; straight, lucid, unaffected exposition follows of his own views on subjects of mutual interest to him and to his visitor. Every moment possible is wrung from time; the mind is hard, concentrated, direct – in a word, ‘Modern.’ The great Italian represents the first emergence of the modern man to power; it is an interesting and instructive phenomenon. Englishmen who have long suffered from statesmanship in skirts can pay him no less, and need pay him no more tribute than to say, ‘Here at least is a man.’¹⁴¹

It is interesting to see Mosley’s infatuation with the modernity of Mussolini, while he also includes language admiring his ultra-masculinity. Clearly, for Mosley, the cult of masculinity and its association with fascist dictatorship was not paradoxical, but part of a particularly fascist vision. This connection between power, action, endurance, and manhood recur in a rather gendered language of fascist modernism.

H. Warner Allen, writing in the *Saturday Review*, was amazed at Mussolini’s supposed knowledge and capacity for absorbing information. He wrote that “Mussolini is distinguished by an exceptionally wide knowledge of science and philosophy. No statesman since Gladstone has read so hard as he.”¹⁴² In 1928, Reverend Alexander Robertson wrote of Mussolini’s administrative prowess in his book *Mussolini and the New Italy*. This book was a repetitive elaboration of the personal power of the “Great Man.” Central to his message was Mussolini’s remarkably rapid progress in creating a newly modern nation from an agricultural backwater. Robertson begins his chapter, “Mussolini, the Reformer,” with an admiring look at Mussolini’s working stamina:

On the 1st of November 1922 Mussolini was at his desk in the Chigi Palace by 5 o’clock. At 9 o’clock, when all the staff of Government workers ought to be at theirs, he made a round of their offices, but found very few. Like Charles Lamb, they were in the habit of coming half an hour late in the morning and going away half an hour earlier in the

¹⁴¹ Mosley, *Daily Mail*, quoted in Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, p. 285.

¹⁴² H. Warner Allen, “Mussolini the Maker of Italy” in *Saturday Review*, July 6, 1935, pp.845.

evening to make up for it. That day they were all made to understand that fines and dismissal would be the reward for such conduct. ...Quite recently Mussolini told a friend of mine that he worked eight hours a day, but it was from 8am till 8pm. I am perfectly sure he works much longer than that, for he is never in bed before midnight. As he rises on the stroke of seven, he thus allows himself only seven hours' sleep.¹⁴³

Hitler, according to British commentators, did not possess the same manic energy or cold logical approach when it came to administration, but possessed his own powerful, machine-like gifts. G. Ward Price, Rothermere's Berlin correspondent, admired his "fantastically retentive memory. He can recall the contents of any book he has ever read, the plot of any play or film he has seen. His staff know that whatever they say to him is automatically recorded in his mind and will be quoted against them if, at some later date, they make a statement at variance with it."¹⁴⁴

Beyond their approaches to administration, the dictators were most applauded for having cut through the obstacles of old-world politics and gotten things done. For instance, after another trip to Rome in 1933, Mosley again wrote of his impressions in the *Daily Mail*:

The change in housing conditions of the people makes the old Italy unrecognizable...Without Fascism these advancements were unthinkable...At the head of state is a man of genius who represents the first emergence of the modern man to power from the turmoil and chaos of the old-world political system...Fascism is destined to be the universal system of the twentieth century...it shall bring Europe a new civilization.¹⁴⁵

As "modern men," Mussolini and Hitler were both seen by Britain's far right as leading their respective nations into the new technological era. Mussolini, for instance, was famous for his mastery of the automobile, motor-cycles, and earning his pilot's license. For British admirers, if there was an example of a politician who embodied the high-speed life of the new world, it was

¹⁴³ Reverend Alexander Robertson, *Mussolini and the New Italy*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1928), pp. 145-146.

¹⁴⁴ G. Ward Price, *I Know These Dictators*, (New York: Holt, 1938), p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ Sir Oswald Mosley, "A World Reborn under Fascism" *Daily Mail*, May 1, 1933, p. 7, (cutting from Mosley papers, B/3/2).

Mussolini. Here was a political leader who, as W.E.D. Allen had written, went “through life in a crash helmet, not in a top hat.” Price wrote of Mussolini’s obsession with high-tech speed that “it is characteristic of the Duce’s restless vitality that he takes an almost boyish delight in speed. He is a first-class motor driver, and though in the streets of Rome he sets an example by observing the traffic-rules, he travels fast in the open country.”¹⁴⁶ Robertson related the story of Mussolini speeding through a country town:

He likes quick movement and is impatient of anything slow. This comes out conspicuously in his motor-car driving, for he is constantly exceeding the legal speed. The other day, returning from Forli, where he had been to see his family and friends, as he raced along the straight road to Bologna, a policeman signaled him to stop. Mussolini did so, but when the policeman saw who it was he begged his pardon and said: ‘Your Excellency, drive on.’ ‘I will do nothing of the kind,’ said Mussolini, ‘take down my name, and I shall pay the fine.’¹⁴⁷

Mussolini showed similar enthusiasm for motor cycles on Italy’s newly built roads. As Price wrote, “A few years ago he took up motorcycling with equal zest. He would flash like a comet along the straight Ostia road, and once he had a collision there with a private car.”¹⁴⁸

Though not driving at break neck speeds himself, according to Price, Hitler was just as taken with the promise of the automotive engineering of the new age. Hitler, he wrote, “has also a strong mechanical bent. Without any practical experience of engineering he takes particular interest in automobiles and motor-boats, being familiar with all the latest refinements of the internal-combustion engine, and quick to notice the features of a new model...When there is an automobile exhibition in Berlin he will spend a couple of hours a day there examining each car

¹⁴⁶ Price, I Know These Dictators, p. 207.

¹⁴⁷ Robertson, Mussolini and the New Italy, p. 144.

¹⁴⁸ Price, I Know These Dictators, p. 206.

in turn.”¹⁴⁹ And Hitler understood the practical political potential of the automobile as well: “He claims to have motored more than half a million miles. ‘I am grateful to the motor-car, for it brought all of Germany within my reach,’ is one of the Fuhrer’s sayings.”¹⁵⁰

Even more than motoring, the dictators’ exploitation of the air generated the most praise. It presented them as both glamorous and uniquely qualified to lead in an era often dominated by air politics. Price was clearly awed by the Duce’s ability in the cockpit and his knowledge of military aircraft. He was even granted the opportunity to fly with Mussolini at the controls. Again we can detect in Price’s tale, the mix of technical modernity with the language of ultra-masculinity:

Mussolini had his first lessons in flying when he was still editor of *Popolo d’Italia*. He passed his tests as a pilot of big three-engined bombing machines in 1936, on both sea and land. His journeys in Italy are generally made by air, and he flies the machine himself, making light of fears that members of the Italian Government express...I had long had a promise from him that he would take me up one day, and in Libya...in March 1937, Mussolini fulfilled it...As I looked over the Duce’s shoulder, the touch of his black-gloved hand upon the wheel seemed light and sure, and he kept the machine as steady as an airliner, despite the bumpy atmosphere above an African desert...when he shut his engine off it seemed to me that he was gliding down too steeply. For a moment I expected a big bump, followed by a bounce into the air, and other disagreeable consequences. But just as my uneasiness became acute, Mussolini flattened out and grounded as gently as a leaf. ‘Did you think I was going to make a bad landing?’ he said. ‘Ah, I know these machines. Like women, they sometimes need handling gently—and sometimes not so gently.’¹⁵¹

Again, the sexual metaphors are explicit. But, also embedded in these kinds of commentaries, was the metaphor of the competently trained professional pilot at the controls of the machine of state.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.208.

Corporatism

The fascist achievement most universally celebrated by British far right observers was the conversion of Italy and Germany to corporatism. Scholars today see Italian and German industrial organization as accomplishing little, save destroying the power of labor. But, at the time, among its admirers in Britain, corporatism appeared to have solved a seemingly insoluble problem: the division of classes and their supposedly irreconcilable interests. On one hand, the destructive parties of revolutionary Marxism appeared to have been suppressed, but at the same time laborers were widely employed, had recourse to labor courts for abuses, and appeared to enjoy far better working conditions. As Mosley said of the system in his own campaigns for corporatism, industrial society had been regulated through the application of science and rationalization to government.

Much has been written about the British far right's admiration of corporatism by other authors, and it has already been briefly discussed in this work. But, there are some comments that bear reiterating in this chapter as part the far right's infatuation with fascist modernization. Perhaps the most vocal British advocate of Italian-style corporatism was Harold Elsdale Goad. Born in 1878, Goad was a sincerely religious man in the Anglican tradition. After spending his early years traveling in Italy, he eventually opened an orphanage in Assisi. He spent his pre-war years in Italy writing mostly religiously inspired novels and poetry and continuing to assist the less privileged. In 1922 he was named the Director of the British Institute of Florence and stayed in that position until 1939. Deeply moved by the impact of Mussolini's social system, he made Florence, according to Richard Griffiths, "a centre of British enthusiasm for Fascism," using the local publication *The Italian Mail* as "a vehicle for such opinions."¹⁵² In the late 1920's Goad

¹⁵² Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, p. 17.

began publishing a string of promotional books describing the successes, as he saw it, of the corporate state. He first published What is Fascism? In 1929, then The Making of the Corporate State in 1932, and finally, with his close friend and co-enthusiast Muriel Currey, published The Working of a Corporate State in 1933. During the 1930's Goad and Currey were regular participants in an informal London group, chaired by Sir Charles Petrie, to study corporatism and its applicability to modern Britain (the London Group for the Study of the Corporate State). Miss Currey acted as its Honorable Secretary.

Goad recognized, he said, that Europe was struggling with old tools to deal with a new, unforeseen world created by production technologies. Therefore, Europe was “trying out in a hundred ways devices to incorporate the results of the Industrial Revolution into their appropriate political setting. The sudden addition of the power of machines to our old order has produced changes so sweeping that they have taken a century to come to the surface.”¹⁵³ The political ideas of left and right were all being tested to see which could bring politics into line with a mechanized world. In corporatism, Goad and his group of followers felt those experiments had finally produced the ultimate solution.

Like so many British pro-fascists, Goad was most disturbed by the influence of speculation and finance capitalism on Britain's slumping economy. Italy, however, appeared to have found a system in corporatism to direct capital toward investment that was “good for the nation.” At the same time it would prohibit investment from private banks which would create profits for the investor at the expense of the general economy. Italy had once been especially vulnerable to this

¹⁵³ Walter Elliott, MP and Minister for Agriculture, in Harold Elsdale Goad and Muriel Currey, The Working of a Corporate State: A Study of National Cooperation (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Ltd., 1933), Foreword.

kind of irrational and harmful investment pattern, said Goad. Still, some critics believed that state intervention would undermine private initiative and innovation; wasn't this simply socialism in another guise? This was a serious conundrum. In the *British-Italian Bulletin*, F. T. Cooper (writing as F. E. Burdett) wrote that corporatism was a "third way" to approach the problem. He said that "if the State were to intervene and run industry, the incentive of personal interest would be lacking and industry would be choked by a bureaucratic system of civil servants which has already led to chaos in another country....The philosophers of Italy realize that a middle course between the two extremes of laissez-faire and State control is necessary."¹⁵⁴ Goad and Currey were more specific about the precise ways capital would be controlled under corporatism, writing:

In no country more than in Italy was there a tendency for unscrupulous men intent on immediate gain, to promote new undertakings, regardless of their ultimate chance for survival; the effect being temporarily to destroy the security of older firms by unnecessary competition, and eventually to involve the shareholder in loss of capital and the workers in loss of employment...The obvious danger of suppressing valuable private initiative is met by the fact that the appeal always lies to the National Council of Corporations and is offset by the opportunity of approved proposals being able to obtain a recommendation for credit from of the great national institutions...The financing of new schemes is no longer dependent on the favor of private bankers who in other countries have few means of gauging the value of new proposals, and are consequently forced to take what may prove to be an unjustifiable risk or to cripple a promising industry by refusal of funds. This system has immensely strengthened the position of the banks, and averted all demand for their socialization.¹⁵⁵

So, for Goad and Currey, the Fascist corporate state intervened by reviewing private investment and only sanctioned that which would result in the overall good. With technical experts of particular industries to review these potential investments, private banks could gain insight they otherwise lacked, and make much more intelligent loans or equity purchases. This would

¹⁵⁴ F. E. Burdett, "The People of Italy are Content" in *the British-Italian Bulletin*, October 3, 1936.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

buttress their ability to remain profitable, while eliminating the hostility of the community and ending calls for socialization. Corporatism seemed, to Goad and his group, to have an answer for even the thorniest of problems.

Banks, of course, would not be the only beneficiaries of such a system. Industrial producers would thrive. Goad and Currey were highly impressed with what they saw as the progress of industry in Italy, despite its late start and its reduced diversity. On top of these inborn problems there was a world-wide economic slump. But, with the advent of the corporate state, Italian industry had overcome these serious barriers and was, according to them, progressing at a remarkable rate: “Looking at the progress of industry in Italy during the last decade, it must be admitted by all that the organs of the Corporate State have not only enabled her many new industries, in spite of their relative lack of resources, to weather the storm of the international crisis, but they have created a spirit of unity and national cooperation favorable to great expansion when the crisis passes away.”¹⁵⁶ What was it about corporatism that enabled this kind of success for industrial producers? The suppression of destructive price-competition by the corporation was certainly one key. The virtual disappearance of costly labor conflicts and strikes was another. Goad and Currey’s enthusiasm for Italy’s “renewed” industrial strength is difficult for the historian to share. In fact, Italy’s economy grew at a rate of only 16% from 1929 to 1939, half the rate of the Liberal era. Italy’s banks collapsed in 1931 necessitating an enormous state bail-out.¹⁵⁷

But, as Goad and Currey saw it, Italy’s economic system had been rationalized for the national benefit. Financial institutions could invest more intelligently and remain private; large

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁵⁷ See Vera Negri Zamagni, An Economic History of Italy 1860-1990. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

and small producers could prosper even in a down market; but, what about the worker? Would corporatism protect the common man? Goad and his group answered emphatically, “yes!” In fact, it was the benefits to ordinary working people which Goad and Currey wrote about with the most passion. Italy’s Charter of Labor was drawn up in April of 1927 and Goad looked at it as a landmark in industrial history. He went as far as to call it the “Magna Carta of Labour” and referred to it as “one of the cardinal documents of the modern world.” It laid down the regulations for factory conditions, wage disputes, public works projects, legal disputes, and the basic organization of corporations. He called this system the “permanent machinery of co-operation.”¹⁵⁸ With representatives from labor as well as company boards and government, corporations would work out equitable agreements on wages, working conditions, output, prices and all other important policies. And both employer and labor would understand the importance of satisfying the other, because “it (corporatism) educates both parties in the policy, the needs and welfare of the other, emphasizing their unity of interest in the industry, and draws out the energy and loyalty of both by the regular business of co-operation.”¹⁵⁹ With all parties represented in the industrial process and inherently cooperating by means of the state system, Goad and Currey became somewhat overwrought in describing it, comparing it favorably to Abraham Lincoln’s vision of liberty:

The Corporate State is “government for the people,” for never before have the working classes been cared for as they are under the present regime. It is “government by the people,” for under the Corporate State they have a control of their own destinies, economic, social, and political, by the method of electing representatives not for their general popularity in geographical constituencies, but for their tried knowledge and experience in their particular trade or industry. It is “government of the whole people,”

¹⁵⁸ Harold Elsdale Goad, The Making of the Corporate State (London: Christophers, 1932), p. 87.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

since state and nation are identified without the intervention of political parties or the artificial division of classes.¹⁶⁰

While the lions' share of praise for corporatism went to Mussolini's Italy, the German system, which ran along similar lines, was also quite popular amongst the British far right. In his chillingly titled book, Hitler's Wonderland, (1934), the anti-Semitic writer Michael Fry praised the Nazi creation of the Labor Front, which was similar in organization to Italy's corporations. Fry was angry with Britain's seemingly chaotic industrial environment and was a proponent of organized capitalism or "rationalized industry" as it was often called. He complained, "There is just no justice when a few men, or a few groups of men, hold in their hands all the instruments of production; the factories, the machines, the land, and the money, and are thus enabled to speed up or slow down production for their own profit. They create sweated labour, unemployment, and are the arbitrary regulators of wages." Of course, labor's own methods of checking this abuse of power were destructive as well. "Workers' syndicates," he said, "with the power to call strikes," produced only further "anarchy and more unemployment."¹⁶¹

Hitler, however, had found the method to end these problems, creating a larger role for the state and organizations specifically designed to curtail abuses. The state, said Fry, would "watch over the relations between workers and employers. Thus, instead of the employer being allowed to do more or less as he pleases in the matter of production and wages, he will be responsible to the State for the efficient management of his business." Hitler's system would have added benefits in a nation not as strapped for resources as Germany. But, in an economy where there

¹⁶⁰ Goad and Currey, The Working of a Corporate State, p. 110.

¹⁶¹ Michael Fry, Hitler's Wonderland (London: John Murray, 1934), pp. 133-134.

was so little margin for error, the state *had* to ensure that the trial and error process of unchecked capitalism was avoided. For this, Hitler was creating his own version of corporations:

Another reason for the establishment of State control in industry and commerce is that under the present capitalist system there is an enormous amount of wastage in production with a resultant increase in prices of goods. There is also a certain amount of chaos because numerous factories carry on their work separately without a central directive force to control them. For that reason there is over-production in one field and a shortage of goods in another, for which the consumer again suffers in the matter of prices. Hitler has created “vertical estates,” or corporations of industry, commerce, handicrafts, etc. which will eventually be included in the Labour Front.¹⁶²

There was, however, much criticism of Hitler’s Labor Front, especially from the left, that accused it of merely facilitating the interests of big capitalist industry at the expense of labor. Such criticisms were rebutted by authors like H. Powys Greenwood. Greenwood wrote a lengthy book assessing Hitler’s rise to power entitled The German Revolution, published in 1934. In it, he argued that Nazism was no tool of capital. He emphasized the Nazi Labor Front’s sympathy with the workers over the capitalist, writing that “it is essential to realize that ever since the revolution the cell organization and the local party authorities have been constantly interfering with business management, and that their influence has almost without exception been exercised on behalf of the workers...they have certainly not favored capitalist interests.”¹⁶³ He saved his greatest adulation for the legal recourse available for laborers and the court to which big business was supposedly accountable:

The most novel feature is the “Court of Social Honour.” Leaders who exploit their followers or followers who endanger social peace by agitation or provocative behavior may be reprimanded, fined or dismissed, which means in the case of a leader, the withdrawal of the right to lead his own business. Dr. Ley of the Labour Front, was very

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 134.

¹⁶³ H. Powys Greenwood, The German Revolution (London: Routledge, 1934), p.220

proud of this feature. Imagine, he said, the head of the United Steel Works or the Dye Trust thus disqualified! How could the workers' interests be better protected?¹⁶⁴

Greenwood was convinced that the mechanisms of state had changed so that employers simply had no choice, but to improve conditions for laborers. He was so moved as to write that "there can be no doubt whatever that employers and managements have never been so considerate to their staffs in matters small and great as they are today. It is obviously the only possible thing to do."¹⁶⁵

Labor and Factories

In addition to the corporatism of Italy and Germany, British observers were greatly impressed by the fascist approach to unemployment and state involvement in labor conditions. The systems of public works which both Hitler and Mussolini had initiated produced powerfully visible results in both unemployment statistics and in gleaming new infrastructures. The British rejection of great public works (and Keynesian policies more generally), by both the Labour and National Governments, left extreme right sympathizers exasperated. The conspicuous accomplishments of fascist labor programs made Britain's apparent ineptitude all the more obvious. In nearly all the political works and travel logs of this genre, a section is devoted to the fine conditions for mandatory labor and the modernization of industrial factories. Fascist authoritarianism seemed to offer concrete proof against the fears of British old-school politicians about the consequences of state funding for public works. Further, having seen labor camps and factories with their own eyes, British far right observers were convinced that fascism was not oppressively squeezing labor for the gain of greedy capitalists. Rather, the state appeared to be regulating industrial conditions for the benefit of capital, labor, and above all, the nation.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 219.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 220.

It looked to many, in fact, as if these programs in Nazi Germany were producing the kind of conditions dreamt of by fascism's arch enemies, the Marxists. In his book, Some Impressions of Nazi Germany (1934), John Wolf wrote of the public works there:

Unemployment is the plague of the modern world and a great problem for the statesmen of the world. The present government is seeking to remove the difficulty by a magnanimous programme for the creation of work. A network of motor roads is being built which is a model for the whole world, the notorious slums of the great towns are being pulled down to make room for dwellings more worthy of human habitation, homes are being renovated, new houses are being built and rivers regulated, and the government appeal for creation of work has reached the remotest village... In this way every family and every individual have their attention drawn to the fact that they owe a duty towards their cold and staring fellow creatures. This is education in Actual Socialism.¹⁶⁶

Germany had changed under Nazism, he proclaimed, "from a Germany in decline to a *progressive* Germany," doing so through humane action, where British Labourites – supposedly devoted to socialism – had produced nothing. Hitler's Germany seemed to be making modern industrial labor an uplifting experience by virtue of its community spirit.

Indeed, Britain's politicians, working in the supposedly worn out and irrational liberal system, had only worsened life for the poor and unemployed. German laborers, on the other hand, while not enjoying great financial gain, were able to live in very reasonable comfort. Norman Hillson, in his book I Speak of Germany published in 1937, wrote of his inspections of German working districts. In these neighborhoods, he said, "there is no obvious distress in Germany. I often went out on my own in search of slum areas and could not find them. In Dusseldorf, Essen, in Breslau, all manufacturing centres, there are no dismal congeries of tumbledown insanitary houses like those which disgrace many boroughs of the East End of London or those terrible shambles which pass for miner's homes in the Rhondda Valley or Ton-y-Pandy."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ John Wolf, Some Impressions of Nazi Germany (London: Golden Eagle, 1934), p.64-66.

¹⁶⁷ Norman Hillson, I Speak of Germany (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1937), p.32.

The Nazi regime, in its first years, passed laws to make public works service mandatory (before unemployment benefits could be drawn) for unemployed able-bodied men and new graduates. These conscripted laborers were put to work on large engineering projects like roads, bridges, railways, and land reclamation projects. The workers were housed in state constructed camps, which raised suspicion among the democratic nations of Europe. Were these camps sites for brutal forced labor, like the notorious concentration camps? Or were they perhaps disguised military training facilities, secretly preparing a massive fighting force out of the view of Treaty monitors and the League of Nations? British far right visitors dismissed these suspicions and instead described a vital, state-focused program that did as much for the laborer as the finished projects would do for the national infrastructure. J. A. Cole wrote a lengthy description as part of his chapter “Spades for All,” in Just Back from Germany (1938):

The camp consisted of a series of low wooden buildings of the kind we used to call ‘army huts,’ erected round a square...At the moment 216 men lived in that camp with 20 officers and under-officers. The men were paid twenty five pfennigs a day...Everything was of course, clean and admirably organized...The obvious aim of the camps, they said, was to build up a man’s body, to make him healthy and useful. But the work did not stop there; they cared for a man’s soul and spirit, for building up his character...Formerly in Germany the members of the various social classes had been strangers to one another and so there had been class hatred...Now the rich man and the poor man worked side by side in tilling the soil. They came to know that each was a human being. They learnt how to live together.¹⁶⁸

Christopher Sidgwick also emphasized the clean conditions of the camps as well as the modern approach to the work being performed. He described a land reclamation crew working near Hamburg and said, “there was no slipshod work being done here: Scientific minds had got to work and had drawn up plans showing by how much this or that river should be widened or deepened...There was no amateur impromptu work about any of this...Engineers were directing

¹⁶⁸ J. A. Cole, Just Back from Germany (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), pp. 289-290.

the operations and from what a barbarian like myself could see, it was being done in a sound business-like way.”¹⁶⁹ The camp itself, he said, included such cozy amenities as “a library and rooms with newspapers and wireless and comfortable chairs, just the places for Germans to be thoroughly happy in of an evening, working up a good fug with a minimum of oxygen and a maximum of tobacco, tall stories and laughter.”¹⁷⁰ Sidgwick also spoke to the suspicions about the militarism of these camps, seeing no evidence of this himself: “There is nothing military about these camps. There are uniforms, sentries, and marching....Nevertheless I am going to stick to my assertion that the Corps is not military, because when dealing with Germans you have to look further into the business...I have talked with dozens of them, in Bremen and elsewhere...and I have never heard a single word to suggest that they feel they are training to be soldiers.”¹⁷¹

In 1933 the *Daily Mail* ran a large article specifically on the German labor camps written by G. Ward Price. The article repeatedly applauded the Nazi system and tried to answer skeptics in its headline, “Germany’s 4000 Labor Camps: Solving Unemployment, Youths rush to join, No Military Training.” Price echoed the sentiments of other far right correspondents, writing that “they are run with the thoroughness, cleanliness, and order that are part of the German character.”¹⁷²

A.P. Laurie also defended the use of public works programs in his written defense of Nazism,

¹⁶⁹ Christopher Sidgwick, *German Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), p.62.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁷² G. Ward Price, “Germany’s 4000 Labor Camps,” *Daily Mail*, Nov. 1, 1933, p.8.

The Case for Germany, published in 1939. Laurie lamented Britain's rejection of such programs and insisted that those who saw economic problems associated with them were mistaken.

Germany's public works also proved that they could be accomplished with humane treatment of workers who put up no resistance whatever. "When the Nazi Government proceeded by the creation of credit to set everyone to work," he said, "the economists here said that inflation and a rise in prices must surely follow. No rise in prices took place... There were no strikes for shorter hours and higher wages. The German workman knowing that he is not being utilized to pile up huge profits for the capitalists, plays the game."¹⁷³ It must be said that Laurie either chose not to mention, or did not understand that German labor had no real organizational mechanisms left for resistance by 1939.

But, beyond the conditions of labor camps, British observers were also taken with the more fulfilling cultural involvement that German laborers seemed able to enjoy. These writers greatly admired the German *Kraft durch Freude* (or "strength through joy") movement within the German labor organization. This program helped laborers to earn vacation travel, gain access to higher education, compete in organized sports leagues, and provided them with access to cultural recreation like the symphony or the stage. Domville-Fife included an entire chapter on the Strength through Joy program in his book. Cole did the same, describing his observations of German industrial laborers enjoying the ballet and opera, in a chapter called "Workers in the Stalls."¹⁷⁴ Francis Yeats-Brown wrote at length on the Strength through Joy program as well in European Jungle (1939):

Today K.d.F. holidays are planned for 11,000,000 workers a year, at a cost which varies from one pound to one pound ten shillings a week. Thousands of small theaters – and

¹⁷³ A. P. Laurie, The Case for Germany (Berlin: International Verlag, 1939), p. 136.

¹⁷⁴ Cole, Just Back from Germany, pp. 277-287.

some huge ones – are devoted to amateur theatricals: in 1937 no less than 480,000 K.d.F. plays were performed, attended by 22,000,000 people. Many millions of German workers have learned to play games for the first time in their lives. Hundreds of thousands have visited foreign countries for the first time. The K.d.F. owns four and charters five large ocean-going steamers for its workers' cruises, which went to Norway, Madeira, the Azores, Italy, and Africa last year.¹⁷⁵

For virtually all British far right visitors, Germany's labor organization (within corporatism), its state sponsored work projects, its clean and modern work camps, and its provision of meaningful workers benefits, all meant that Germany was far closer to a "worker's paradise" than Britain's liberalism or the Soviet system had ever approached. For several authors, these views were complimented by visits to German factories to see industrial conditions first hand. The reports were overwhelmingly favorable and re-emphasized the Nazis' modernizing approach. Domville-Fife wrote of his tour of Germany's largest film studio and was mesmerized by the "maze of electric cables, lights and props." Hillson spoke of the new effort in Germany to bring factories into up-to-date form for the worker and he specially mentions the intervention of the state in this process:

Every new factory that is erected in Germany must conform to very strict standards of lighting, sanitation, washing facilities and ventilation for the workers. But in an old established country like Germany, there are necessarily many ancient and unsatisfactory buildings still being employed as workshops. It is impossible to sweep them all away, but plans are on foot to make every place where men are employed as up to date as possible. Certain manufacturers have insufficient money to provide additional conveniences for their workers without going out of business, and here again the K.d.F. has stepped in. A sum of 200,000,000 *rentenmarks* has been advanced in order to provide workers with surroundings in factories that are clean and make for industrial well being. Ten million pounds spent for such a purpose is rightly regarded as money well used.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Francis Yeats-Brown, European Jungle (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1939), p. 156.

¹⁷⁶ Hillson, I Speak of Germany, p.159.

Sidgwick described multiple visits to factories in his account a well. The most detailed of these were his visits to the Krupp works in the Ruhr Valley and then to the Zeiss works in Jena. He was very impressed with the clean and orderly housing provided on site at the Krupp facility and even included a photo plate in the book. He wrote that the Krupp site “seemed a very good place, even in that weather...as well as giving workers clean rooms and homes to live in, the colony was large enough to give each a piece of land for vegetable gardens...If I had to work an eight hour shift in a steel foundry, I know very well that I would have vastly preferred going home to an airy and green district on a hill to wandering back home down some stuffy side street.”¹⁷⁷ But, his greatest admiration was for the Zeiss works, a factory complex that produced the world’s finest photography equipment and lenses. He felt he had stepped into the future, he said, for “a quite new standard of accuracy was revealed to me. Measurements were not made in inches, nor even millimeters; accuracy was measured in terms of hundredths of thousandths of one millimeter, and for some little time I could not grasp the meaning of all this.” A bit awed by the scientific apparatus around him, he said, “I seemed to have come into a new world.”¹⁷⁸

Transport and Infrastructures

The accomplishments of fascist powers in constructing impressive ships, planes, and railways were particularly strong visual examples to British admirers of the potency of authoritarian government. Great state projects, such as Germany’s autobahn deeply impressed British visitors and made them reflect on their own homeland and its problems with updating infrastructures. Changing the landscape to accommodate the latest transport technologies and power systems seemed the ultimate expression of fascism’s modernizing power.

¹⁷⁷ Sidgwick, Germany Journey, p.54.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.135.

In the case of shipping, a field traditionally dominated by Britain, this caught the attention of far right commentators very early. As early as 1926, The BF's publication, *The British Lion*, reported that Italy had arrived in terms of its shipbuilding prowess and suggested the connection between this technical skill and "great nation status." In an article titled, "Progressive Italy," it said "The Fascist regime is making Italy a great country. The biggest ship built last year was the "Saturnia," a motor liner of 24,500 tons. Italy built it! The largest ship in Great Britain was to the order of Italy. The Italian ship yards are now building the "Augustus," a 30,000 ton motor liner. There are not many unemployed Italians!"¹⁷⁹ In the *Fascist Bulletin* that same year G. W. P. McLachlan wrote of "the astonishing progress made by practically all of the Italian lines in almost every direction." Furthermore, under Fascism's policies, Italy had "added a large number of new and up-to-date vessels to the fleets of most of their ship-owning companies; they have taken up the internal combustion engine with a keenness only equaled by this country...and they have extended their overseas services and enlarged their markets. Such accomplishments, in such a period of world-wide depression, are worthy of more than passing notice."¹⁸⁰

Germany's attainments in modern shipping infrastructure were also widely admired by British pro-fascists. Norman Hillson wrote his book *I Speak of Germany* as part travel log, part political tract, which pleaded for Britons to accept their natural affinities with the German people. In recounting his visit to Hamburg he was astounded at the boom in shipping and the great size of the vessels. He wrote that "There had been a very definite revival in trade and the shipyards were busy building and repairing...A great ship towered above a forest of timber in a slipway of

¹⁷⁹ *The British Lion*, July, 1926, p. 10.

¹⁸⁰ *Fascist Bulletin*, February 13, 1926, p.1.

Bleohm&Voss's yard. 'There is a fine ship,' I was told. 'She is a German ship built here in Hamburg. In Hamburg we make the best ships in the world.'"¹⁸¹

Domville-Fife, the ex-Naval officer and pro-German recounted in This is Germany, his special interest in Germany's modernization of its harbors. The massive machinery for moving ships, diverting water, and transferring cargo so interested him that he made a special visit to Hamburg just "to see yet another of the practical achievements of Modern Germany." What fascinated him most was the world's largest ship elevator for lifting crafts to the level of connecting canals. He spends three pages waxing eloquently on their technical details and even comparing it to one of the most famous engineering projects on earth:

The dimensions of the whole giant structure are: 308 feet long, 89 feet wide and 196 feet high. So evenly balanced is the water-and-ship lift against the weights, that it can be raised or lowered by four electric motors of 75 horsepower each. The motors, which stand on and form part of the lift, are so connected with each other that if one of the four fails, the total of 300 horsepower is distributed equally among the other three motors...I travelled up by passenger lift to the top of this immense ship elevator and watched it in continuous operation for an hour. The smoothness of its working and the absence of unnecessary noise...acted as a reminder of what impressed me most when passing in a great liner through the Panama Canal.¹⁸²

He was further attracted to the mechanized cargo systems of "Germany's most up-to-date warehouse. It is able to accommodate 4000 railway wagon loads of merchandise; and a nearby coal-tipper can discharge the contents of 20 super-wagon loads of coal direct into the bunkers of a ship in one hour."¹⁸³

Railways were another regular feature in the extreme right celebration of fascist modernization. The idea that Mussolini had made the trains run on time was not yet a tired

¹⁸¹ Hillson, I Speak of Germany, p.174-175.

¹⁸² Charles Domville-Fife, This is Germany (London: Seely, Service and Co., 1939), p. 120

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

cliché and several authors praised the miracles the Duce had performed with Italian transit. As early as 1925, an anonymous author in the *Fascist Bulletin* wrote “Prior to the advent of *Fascismo*, railway trains were very often unpunctual and frequently late...At present the railway trains run according to a printed time table, the arrivals and departures being punctual and within the usual limits of error.”¹⁸⁴ But, the Duce’s achievement did not stop with simply bringing reliability to the network. By the 1930’s right wing authors were breathlessly congratulating Italy’s inauguration of 100 mile an hour train service. In *Action*, for instance, the railways were seen as a strong symbol of Fascism’s power to move the nation forward with technology and efficiency:

Nothing more clearly represents the amazing difference between the old and new Italy than the development of the railways into an efficient and reliable national service, offering every comfort and facility to the modern traveler. One of the first acts of the Fascist Government was the modernization of the railways...it set to work upon a vast scheme of electrification and extension of the railways. In order to accommodate heavier locomotives and streamlined trains with speeds up to 100 m.p.h., the Italian State Railways, between October 1934 and last autumn, built a further 682 miles of track and reconditioned or rebuilt 240 bridges. Also (we read in the “Railway Gazette”), the number of curves on the 682 miles under revision was greatly reduced and efficiency studied by the use of electric or pneumatic machinery for track laying. And now the latest news is that Italian cities are to be linked by a 100 m.p.h. train service.¹⁸⁵

Germany’s improved railways came in for compliments from British visitors as well. In Sidgwick’s *German Journey* (1936), for instance, the author was anxious to try out the new diesel express trains that were said to be remarkably comfortable and free from vibration. He was not disappointed. He described the train as “a stream lined thing with a face like a beetle and sweeping lines,” which “did the journey of seventy miles or thereabouts in a an hour...Even when we clattered across points at sixty miles an hour it was possible to continue writing at the

¹⁸⁴ “Practical Fascism in Italy,” *Fascist Bulletin*, June 20, 1925, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ “Italy’s 100 m.p.h. Train Service,” *Action*, April 9, 1936.

little table in front of you....I doubt if even that great detective (Sherlock Holmes) could have told from what I was writing then that I had been writing it as I was being carried swiftly across the flat fields and through the pine woods between Bremen and Hamburg.”¹⁸⁶

British guests were mostly impressed, however, with the 100 m.p.h. service available on the “fliers.” Hillson, in I Speak of Germany, spent many pages describing the wonders of Germany’s modernized rails. He was mostly captivated by the sheer speed with which German life was moving and the seemingly endless scale of German industry. On his way to Cologne, he wrote:

The flying trains are not the least remarkable innovations of this new Germany. For hour after hour we sped along at an average of 160 kilometers – one hundred miles – an hour, the dial of a speedometer indicating what can only be described as the train’s velocity...It seemed as if one had scarcely time to settle down and read the opening pages of one’s book, before the train had stopped and through the windows one read the word “Hanover. As the snake-like train had rushed its way through the Ruhr one caught frequent glimpses of glaring blast furnaces and factories with a thousand lighted windows. At Dusseldorf huge arc-lamps picked out the high white walls of a city which is at once a tourist centre and the hub of great industry.¹⁸⁷

This journey of his, however, was made at night so the visual impact was lessened. Later in his travels, Hillson took the “Hamburg Flier,” or “Flying Hamburger,” during the afternoon. This prompted another round of discussion on the remarkable, but intimidating, speed and efficiency in Germany:

...the Hamburg flier – two coaches only, articulated together. Another diesel motor train ready to cross the landscape at a hundred miles an hour. Nearly every seat was taken. There was no delay. The two coaches had come two minutes before the scheduled time of departure and in two minutes a whistle had blown and we were on the move...When I travelled on a flying train to Cologne the journey was made at night-time and it was not possible fully to appreciate the speed at which the train was travelling. But now it was eleven o’clock in the morning and the experience was different...the noise ceased as the

¹⁸⁶ Sidgwick, German Journey , p. 72.

¹⁸⁷ Hillson, I Speak of Germany, p. 37-38.

train seemed to rush into space. And for two hours, houses, woods, telegraph poles, rivers, bridges and factories whizzed past the windows with a speed that was almost sickening...Almost before one had glanced at the morning newspapers, the train was riding triumphantly into the suburbs of Hamburg...¹⁸⁸

The BUF's *Action* was no less enthusiastic, once again using Germany's technical advances as an object lesson in their campaign to bring fascism to Britain. In the article entitled "Germany's Blue Riband Flyer," the anonymous "Berlin Correspondent" wrote of his courtesy tour provided by the German State Railways. The Agency provided a demonstration of the production facilities and, of course, a special high-speed trip on the "Flying Hamburger," with a seat in the engineer's cockpit. His first impressions were simply of the incredible speed reached by the train: "As I took my seat next to the driver, who never so much as even turned his head, the vehicle was screaming along at just over 102 miles per hour, a perfectly terrifying spectacle! At such speeds...every now and again, for instance, we encountered flocks of birds several of which could not clear the vehicle and caught by the dome shaped front panel appeared to burst with a sound almost like the crack of a gun. Flies piled up on the screen so fast that a jet of water had to be constantly turned on it to ensure visibility!"¹⁸⁹ He also investigated some of the technical details that allowed for such breakneck speeds. He credited the German engineers for creating a system that could be piloted almost entirely without a sensory connection to the scenery outside:

With great vision and realizing the terrific strain on these drivers, the designers of the vehicle have made its control a model of efficient arrangement. All controls are on a small desk at which the driver sits, and every lever is right at his finger ends. In front of him is a speedometer – a large dark room type clock – the two instruments forming the central motif of his brief but intense duties. For almost two hours the vehicle rarely fell below 102 miles per hour, and the driver relied almost entirely on charts of the route to enable him to ease speed in advance of curves and level crossings etc...The two

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.167.

¹⁸⁹ "Germany's Blue Riband Flyer," *Action*, September 3, 1936, p. 11.

Mayback-Zeppelin type engines which form the motive power of the Hamburger were not noticeably obtrusive even at maximum speed...Slowing down to 80 miles per hour speed gave us a comparison.¹⁹⁰

To the writers, and doubtless the readers, of *Action*, the Germans' ability to "push the envelope" in speed and automation contrasted with British failure in this area and suggested the possibilities that authoritarianism could produce. The "Berlin Correspondent," ended the article by saying "the Flying Hamburger is a colossal achievement, and would appear to anticipate a revolution in rail technique likely to improve speeds and services throughout the world."¹⁹¹

One of the prerequisites of improved rail service was the spread of electrification on the continent. British pro-fascists felt that in Italy, Fascism had provided a workable vision and a regulated business environment to enable a rationalized and rapid expansion of the electric grid. This was held up in comparison to Britain's own problems with the multitude of inefficient small providers in a tangle of competition and unplanned coverage. Goad and Currey wrote that Mussolini's Fascists had intelligently consolidated the producers into a "single scheme," but had then left distribution to private enterprise, preserving a balance between state regulation and private initiative. They went on to say, "Every electrical undertaking is faced with the possibility of competition. There are no monopolies and no privileged concessions in any geographical area and thus, where economically justified, the production of new supplies (by the consolidated state concern) is unrestricted by the vested interests of older companies."¹⁹² The results for Italy defied the predictions of old-fashioned economic ideas that said with government regulation prices would be preserved at artificially high levels. According to Goad and Currey, "The net

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹² Goad and Currey, *The Working of a Corporate State*, p. 80.

result is for the consumer that in no other country is the price of electricity as low as in Italy, and nowhere is it easier to obtain a sufficient supply.”¹⁹³ This assessment of Italian progress stood in sharp contrast to far right opinions about Britain’s electrification. Compared to Italy’s supposedly rational and national planning, Britain was “dotted with a multitude of small electrical undertakings that ought all to be scrapped, that are the last word in wastefulness and ineffectiveness and that have so far stood like a rock in the way of dealing with the problem of Balight and power along broad *national* and *modern* lines.”¹⁹⁴

As much as the dictatorships had accomplished in shipbuilding, railways, and electrification, the most impressive of their attainments, for British pro-fascists, were in the construction of motorways. In Italy and especially in Germany, the rational design and the sheer vastness of new motorway systems were literally “paving the way” for the new era of the automobile. To Britain’s far right, this was the most obvious symbol of fascist government’s unique power to lead the world into the future. In fact, said A. Raven Thomson, road construction had been deeply connected to national leadership throughout history. Looking at the fascist powers of the time, Thomson saw their similarity to the revolutionizing states of history, with roads as a timeless symbol: “History has shown a clear connection between road-building and authority. The great authoritarian rulers have been the road-builders. In ancient times the Roman Emperors based their Empire on their roads, so did the Incas in Peru and the Monguls (sic) in India. Even

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.81.

¹⁹⁴ “Our Electrical Backwardness,” *Saturday Review*, January 13, 1926, p. 78. Subsequent research by scholars like Thomas P. Hughes has validated this rather scathing opinion. Hughes found that Britain’s political atmosphere in the Pre-War era, with its combination of Liberal Free-Trade convictions and a rising Labour Party (which militated against large conglomerates, and endorsed local providers) had kept the power industry small and fragmented. See Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

in modern times it was Napoleon who gave France her magnificent *Routes Nationales*, Mussolini who built the “*Autostrada*,” and Hitler, who now leads the world in road construction with his network of *Autobahnen*.”¹⁹⁵

Nearly every book from this era describing Germany, or urging a political reconciliation between Germany and Britain, includes glowing reviews and impressive photographs of Germany’s highways. Domville-Fife spent an entire chapter of *This is Germany* in celebrating the German autobahn and describing the conversations he carried on with some its engineers and administrators. He begins the chapter by describing these gleaming new roads and seeing them as an expression of the power, efficiency, and modernity of German authoritarianism:

Of the many visual examples of what has been accomplished during the first decade of the new regime, there are thousands of miles of *autobahnen*. These are certainly among – and perhaps, are actually the best – motor highways in the world. It is no exaggeration to say that the brain and hand which, in this respect as in so many other enterprises, is bringing Germany once again rapidly to the forefront among modern nations, is doing so with a breadth of vision and a resolution that is truly remarkable. To prevent these roads from competing unfairly they are all under the control of the German State Railways Administration, and a fast motor-coach service has become both a feature of the roads themselves and a feeder to the railway system.¹⁹⁶

In describing the roads themselves, authors like J. A. Cole marveled at both their modern aesthetics and utility. Even ordinary Germans on a motor coach were “excited about the roads and people now and again stood up just to watch the surface going by the window.”¹⁹⁷ To his own eye, Cole found the roads to be a new threshold in working efficiency, writing: “The perfection of these roads from a motorist’s viewpoint has to be experienced to be believed. It is actually an odd experience to drive at a uniform high speed for a long period without once being

¹⁹⁵ A. Raven Thomson, *Motorways for Britain: A Constructive Solution to the Traffic Problem* (BUF Press, 1934), p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Domville-Fife, *This is Germany* , p.106-108.

¹⁹⁷ Cole, *Just Back from Germany*, p. 152.

compelled to slacken the pace or to be careful on a corner.” Domville-fife was no less enthusiastic about the rationality of their design as it related to the driver:

While on my way from Berlin to Stettin my car was able to travel both in safety to other road users and to myself at 80 miles an hour for 30 miles without changing gear or applying the brakes. All cross-roads are taken overhead on standardized concrete and steel bridges. The centre of the road is occupied by a broad strip of grass. There is a “slow” and a “fast” up track and the same for downward traffic. There are no pedestrians or cyclists on these roads; and there are no sidewalks... ‘The main motor roads pass through no village or town. Special side-roads or ‘spurs’ connect with all inhabited settlements. Around Greater Berlin an enormous ring is being built into which seven different Reich Motor Roads will empty from as many different directions.’¹⁹⁸

He later describes the maintenance and support systems for the autobahns that the state services provide. He says, for instance, that “There is a day and night patrol service on these roads by the German Railway Motor Police. A well-equipped breakdown service is always ready to be sent out, and telephones are placed at equal intervals of one and half miles.” He continues by quoting the comments of road engineer Heinrich Gesell, who discusses the scientific approach to the construction of the roads. He especially emphasizes the modern principles of organization and standardization in that process: “Operations were therefore commenced in 1934, after several months of scientific research and investigation in the theory and practice of road-building...Everything in connection with the construction was reduced to a standard where possible, especially so far as building materials were concerned.”¹⁹⁹ The maintenance responsibility and ownership of the roads was also centralized and up-dated, according to the road engineers. They claimed that previously “In the control and maintenance of Germany’s vast network of roads and highways, there were formerly close on 750 States, Provinces and Townships, all working independently, and not subject to orders from any superior authority.

¹⁹⁸ Domville-Fife, This is Germany, p. 107, 109.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.114.

The general arrangement and apportionment of roads and highways was not based on practical or technical considerations, but was rather historical in its origin.”²⁰⁰ The Nazi state had modernized the old disorganized patchwork.

Other modern ideas were embedded in these road systems, some of which were identified in a speech by the German Eugen Lehnkering, delivered to a meeting of the Anglo-German Fellowship in 1937. The transcript of the speech was run in *Action* under the headline “How Germany is Becoming Rich.” In it, Herr Lehnkering mentioned some hidden benefits of Germany’s road building:

The most out of the way areas—not connected by roads or railways—have been linked up with the rest of the country by these means (autobahns). The roads have naturally increased the value of the land in their neighborhood and they are assisting greatly in decentralizing industry. Do I need to dwell on the encouragement to the motoring trade and associated industries brought about by the new roads? Owners of old cars waste no time in providing themselves with new ones, in order to enjoy to the full the advantages of the roads. Distances between centres are actually shortened both in space and time. One of the greatest advantages is that accidents have been reduced by two-thirds on these roads.²⁰¹

So, modern notions of rationalized organization (in construction, maintenance and ownership), consumerism (the spur to buy new autos), and safety were all involved in the German version of road-building. But, for some, like Sir Barry Domvile (not to be confused with Charles Domville-Fife), the development of German motorways said something even more surprising. Domvile found in German motoring a freer system than existed in Britain. As part of his consistent, calculated defense of Nazism, he emphasized the freedom of the individual in Germany in direct response to the more prevalent views of Nazi suppression. In his 1936 book By and Large, he wrote:

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

²⁰¹“How Germany is Becoming Rich: a précis of a speech delivered on Feb. 17 at the Anglo-German Fellowship by Herr Eugen Lehnkering,” *Action*, March 6, 1937, p. 3.

I am a great believer in first impressions and some of my earliest in Germany made me wonder whether England is really quite so much a land of the free as we are all so fond of bucking about. In many respects poor oppressed Nazi Germany is much better off. To start with, you can drive your car at any speed that your reason considers safe, without the ever-present fear which haunts one over here of attracting the undesired attentions of a disguised policeman, intent on victims. There are no speed limits in Germany. Even in Berlin you can park your car pretty well where you please.²⁰²

Finally, for Domville-Fife and many other British observers of fascist modernization, Germany's roads were dramatic expressions of the health and virility of the nation. He wrote, "it is indeed true that the highways of a country personify the cultural unity of its people. They are the arteries through which flow constant streams of men and women and all kinds of merchandise, coming and going from one place to another." He ends by quoting German road engineer, Dr. Wolfgang Mejer who said, "Well-built and well-kept highways testify to the energy, industry and culture of a nation."²⁰³

Aviation and Authoritarianism

Britain's far right was nothing if not "air-minded." This has already been discussed in terms of the number of prominent air professionals who were part of the movement. Where the continental dictators were concerned, extreme right commentators were full of admiration for their embrace of the new technology. Most of the discussion about aircraft and air-related technologies was bound up with (and in fact dominated) the vitriolic debate about Britain's national defense. That specific issue, however, will be reviewed in a subsequent chapter. This section will focus on British pro-fascists and their admiration for fascist non-military aviation.

Many of Britain's far right enthusiasts were especially enamored with Italy's Air Marshall, Italo Balbo. Though he had no air experience before taking office, Balbo learned to fly and

²⁰² Admiral Sir Barry Domville, By and Large, London, 1936, quoted in Griffiths, Fellow Travelers of the Right, p. 180.

²⁰³ Domville-Fife, This is Germany, p. 108.

became Italy's most famous airman. He had overseen Mussolini's program of mass expansion and updating of the *Regia Aeronautica* (Italy's Air force) as well as expanding commercial aviation. But, for most in Britain during the 1930's, he was best known as the Marshall of the "Air Armada" that travelled to North America in the summer of 1933. This was a calculated and effective public relations gesture by Italy to display its newly acquired power in the air. Balbo and many other air officers led a fleet of 24 Savoia Marchetti SM55.X flying boats from Italy across the Alps and over the Atlantic with stops in England, Ireland, Iceland, and Labrador. Eventually the fleet landed spectacularly on the surface of Lake Michigan across from the World's Fair audience in Chicago. After the World's Fair ended, Balbo and his Armada flew on to New York for a ticker tape parade and lunch with President Roosevelt. The Italian Armada received consistent and sensational coverage in far right publications like the *Daily Mail* and the *Saturday Review*.

Balbo was seen as a modern hero with the kind of courage and charisma lacking among Britain's politicians. Certainly Britain had its own crop of glamorous aviators who received regular coverage and adulation, but its politicians were generally panned for their cluelessness in air matters. In a review of Balbo's book recounting the journey, the *Saturday Review* marveled at the confidence it took for the Fascist government to attempt such a coup: "The whole flight must assuredly be regarded as an achievement of the first magnitude, demanding not only skill and courage on the part of the crews and organizers, but a sublime faith on the part of the Italian Government, for the possibilities for crushing disaster were enormous."²⁰⁴ Beyond the spectacle,

²⁰⁴ "Air Pioneers," *Saturday Review*, June 16, 1934, p. 704.

Balbo was seen in Britain as producing genuine results in making supposedly backward Italians into a modern, air-minded people. The *Daily Mail*, in an article connected with Italy's rearmament, credited him with great progress and quoted him saying, "Our propaganda to render the youth of Italy air-minded was most successful in 1933. Three hundred cadets obtained their pilot certificates without an accident. Forty-nine gliding schools were instituted, attended by 1,600 pupils from aircraft factories and 1,927 apprentices."²⁰⁵

Outside of Italy, the BUF took notice in 1937 of a breakthrough flight by the Japanese which flew from Tokyo to London. *Action* regularly denounced Britain for allowing Japanese products to penetrate the home and imperial markets. But, it defended Japan's authoritarian, quasi-fascist government and its right to aggressively colonize China. British fascists generally saw Japan as a fascist or fascist-inspired nation and supported its nationalist policies. Along these lines, "Blackbird" (actually Geoffrey Dorman the regular aviation correspondent for the BUF), wrote a column titled "A Great Flight Across the World," celebrating the Japanese achievement and making special note of the fact that the machine and pilots were entirely Japanese. Clearly, the flight indicated that Japan (under its new authoritarian government) was entering a new day, and looming as yet another threat to British air power:

The two Japanese aviators who flew from Tokyo to London in something under four days are to be congratulated on a very fine performance indeed. The flight is comparable with that made in October of 1934 by Scott and Black, who flew from London to Melbourne in roughly the same time... The flight is interesting in that it was made with an aeroplane and an engine both of which were built in Japan for ordinary military requirements... The builders are the Mitsubishi Company, who for the last fourteen or fifteen years have been building all sorts of aeroplanes, some more or less original, and others copies of well known designs... The success of this flight and the remarkable flight made by the Italian "Breda 88," which averaged about 321 mph round a triangular course, makes one wonder whether our own high-speed aeroplanes for the Royal Air Force, which have been so long

²⁰⁵ "Italian Air Chief and Warplane Plans" *Daily Mail* January 12, 1934, p. 11.

delayed in construction will really be so far ahead of the world as the Air Ministry would have us think.²⁰⁶

Aside from Italy and Japan, British pro-fascists especially admired German advances in the air. In the first years of the 1930's their admiration necessarily revolved around civil aviation, as Germany was still prohibited from developing an air force. In 1935, however, Germany openly declared not only its ongoing production of military aircraft, but proclaimed its parity with the Britain's RAF. Before 1935, however, many on Britain's extreme right welcomed Germany's development of air technology and saw it as no threat whatever. C. G. Grey was one of the most open in his enthusiasm for German air development. In *The Aeroplane* he said that there was

...nothing to show that Germany today is a menace in the air. And Germany five years hence may be quite a different question. We know that Reichsfuhrer Hitler, although not a pilot himself, travels most consistently by air. Also, an intelligent national leader, he knows that air power is the chief protection of any nation today. But there is nothing to show that the Reichsfuhrer has any aggressive intentions towards any other country, so long as Germany is left alone.²⁰⁷

This language was characteristic of Grey. He consistently defended Nazi Germany and was excited about any way the fascist powers could discredit Britain's "flabby" democracy through demonstrations of technological prowess. He was very supportive of Germany's establishment of an Air Ministry in 1933 and a great admirer of Hermann Goering, in whom he saw the potential for a great air leader: "Captain Von Goring was a distinguished war pilot...we may yet see him handling in Germany a position similar to that which General Balbo has held for so many years and with such success and distinction in Italy."²⁰⁸ Rotheremere's *Daily Mail* also saw Goring as a great leader and regularly portrayed him in heroic terms in its pages. On its

²⁰⁶ "A Great Flight Across the World" *Action*, April 17, 1937, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ C. G. Grey, "On Germany in the Air," *the Aeroplane*, August 15, 1934, p.196.

²⁰⁸ Grey, *the Aeroplane*, February 8, 1933, p. 207.

foreign affairs page it used an illustration of Goring in the cockpit with determined expression, and his hands firmly on the controls, flying around Germany on his political campaigns. Its captions read, “German Propaganda by Air: General Goring, Minister of the Interior, at the controls of the aeroplane in which he flew round Germany to direct propaganda in connection with the forthcoming election.”²⁰⁹ Here was a truly modern-minded politician.

But, it was not only government officials who came in for praise. British observers also admired the state’s accomplishment in making the entire nation “air-minded,” a ubiquitous phrase in extreme right discourse. Descriptions of Germany’s air facilities and culture were common in the pro-German accounts, as several British guests were given tours of aerodromes and air manufacturing facilities. Hillson, for example, wrote of his visit to the Cologne aerodrome:

One need not be in Germany for more than a few hours to realize that here is a people that has moved with the times and has become air-minded. It is not a question of military sense. For the Germans of to-day the conquest of the air is a matter of common sense. Wherever one travels, throughout the length and breadth of the Reich, one comes across magnificent airfields...there is surely no more striking airfield in all Germany than that at Cologne...Today the once modest flying-ground has been transformed into a spacious air base which is used every hour of day and night by most of the important civil flying companies in Europe and Great Britain...The whole field is laid out on a vast scale in anticipation of the inevitable progress of flying as a universal means of travel and transport.²¹⁰

J. A. Cole was offered a tour of the *Graf Zeppelin* as part of a small aircraft exhibition, and was greatly impressed. His guide explained the ship’s dimensions (776 feet long), and that it had crossed the Atlantic some 140 times. Though it was a small exhibition, he said, it “somehow conveyed to me most vividly a sense of the years of experiment and effort that went to the making of this great craft and of its colossal achievements since it made its maiden voyage...It

²⁰⁹ *Daily Mail*, November 4, 1933, p. 11.

²¹⁰ Hillson, *I Speak of Germany*, p.54.

was, I think, one of the most exciting and exhilarating things I saw in Germany.”²¹¹ Cole was aware, however, that the day of the airships was passing, but said, “About the airship controversy I know nothing. I am in favour of airships for the no better reason than that I like to see them in the air.” Dorman, the BUF’s air correspondent, however, was in no doubt about the future of the airship. As interesting and “cutting edge” as the Zeppelins had been, the modern obsession with speed had sealed their fate. In the regular aviation column in *Action* he wrote a piece with the title, “The Airship is Doomed: The superior Speed of Modern Aeroplanes Will Drive Them From the Sky.” It ended with the assertion that “the airship is doomed on one count, at any rate; and that is speed...in these days of 200-300 mph air travel one may just as well travel in the luxurious ocean-going liners if one is in no hurry.”²¹²

Among the various visits to Germany, there occurred many tours conducted specially by air or conducted specifically to observe Germany’s emerging air culture. These “air tours” were reported regularly by Grey in *the Aeroplane*, including their itineraries, exchange of ideas, business development, and facility tours. These reports were generally spun to present Germany as highly modern and as being a tolerant, energized society. One group he reported on had visited the Junker *Flugzeugwerke* at Dessau and been given a tour by Goering himself. Grey wrote that “the German Air Minister...remarked that they would have seen by now how little the German nation was an oppressed people.”²¹³ Grey was known to take his own air tours on the continent, as well. In a letter to Luttman-Johnson, he described his 1939 air tour of Spain as a guest of Infante Alfonso, who was commanding a brigade of the National Air Force. As a

²¹¹ Cole, Just Back from Germany, p. 60.

²¹² Geoffrey Dorman, “The Airship is Doomed,” *Action*, April 16, 1936, p.7.

²¹³ Grey, “A Tour In Germany,” *The Aeroplane*, June 14, 1933, p. 1066.

climax to the tour he was able to watch for himself the mopping-up operations at the battles of Teruel and the Ebro – “Finishing the Reds!” as he would put it. Like so many of the extreme right who took these air tours, he came away with great enthusiasm, praising Spain’s new dictator, and writing to his friend, “Aren’t the Franco crowd a nice lot!”²¹⁴

His best documented air tours, however, were of the German air program. The BUF’s bound journal, *Fascist Quarterly* published a compilation of Grey’s memoirs of his German air facility tours in a piece titled “In Germany To-Day.” In it, Grey lauded Hitler’s Germany for its new found focus on air technology and also the Nazi regime’s accomplishment in overcoming its traditions and producing a truly modern state. For him the air research facility at Berlin, (the *Deutsche Versuchsanstalt fur Luftfahrt*, or German Research Establishment for Air Transport) and the engineers who put on the conference there, were perfect examples of how Hitler was transforming his nation.

The Director of the Technical Department of the German Air Ministry, Ministerialrat Adolf Baumker, soldier, aviator, technical administrator, ..was primarily responsible of the Conference and all it entailed. So to him we English visitors owe thanks for our enjoyable visit to Germany...it is a beautiful example of how to lay out a research establishment...I may be right or I may be wrong, but the impression I got was that Hitler, the Leader rather than the Dictator of the people, has not only freed Germany from Communism and disruption by Oriental square-heads, he has freed Germany from the Prussian jack-boot and the rule of the Blonde Beast, of whom some misguided philosophers made almost a god. Today Germany is ruled by sensible middle class men...²¹⁵

From the scientific research station he was taken to the aerodrome at Doeberitz, where he was able to observe the layout of the facility, and then to the construction of the new Air Ministry offices. He was also delighted to meet Air Minister Goering again. He described Goering as

²¹⁴ Letter from C. G. Grey to H. W. Luttman-Johnson, May 15, 1940, Luttman-Johnson Papers, HLJ1-43.

²¹⁵ C. G. Grey, “In Germany To-Day,” *Fascist Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April, 1936, p. 249.

looking “amazingly fit considering his heavy responsibilities and the enormous amount of work that he does...he is still the same good fellow that he was when he was merely a dashing young leader of air fighters.” Of the facilities he wrote:

The arrangement of the aerodrome is distinctly good. Instead of a huddle of sheds at one end, carefully arranged so that if a bomb does get among them it is going to lay out as many as possible, the Doeberitz aerodrome is laid out with repair shops at one side and the three big flight sheds distributed at equal distances around the edge...The new Air Ministry certainly is a fine affair, and when it is finished it will make all the difference to the efficiency of the Luftwaffe and all that depends upon it...(the underground offices) are to be used by the officials and the clerical staff of an Air Ministry which covers every branch of air activity. And as they are designed with German thoroughness to promote efficiency the general scheme is one person, one room...to have the highest possible efficiency each individual must have a separate room. About the highest efficiency in nature is a beehive. You do not find two bees trying to work in one cell of a honeycomb...In his speech to the builders of the Air Ministry, General Goring reminded them that the indomitable will of the Reichs Chancellor Hitler was shaping the German nation. He said that the new Air Ministry reflected that spirit of discipline.²¹⁶

In addition to the middle class technocratic community he so admired, he was also impressed by the riot of new construction, the advance of the new technologies, and the contentment of ordinary people. In Berlin, he said, there were, “five times as many cars and delivery vans and light trucks in the streets of Berlin as there were three or four years ago. The amount of work that is going on in the streets is astonishing...A new underground railway is being built on the cut-and-cover principle, which jams the streets somewhat. Any amount of re-paving and widening is being done, and there is an immense amount of building in progress.”²¹⁷ The human results, he said, were immediately visible to the English visitor.

The people themselves look absolutely different. They are obviously better fed. Their clothes are made of better material. And what we should call the lower middle classes, that is to say, the black coated workers, wear well-cut clothes...I have never seen so many people laughing...My impression driving around the working areas of Berlin was

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 252-253.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 246.

that everybody laughed because they felt that things were going well... In fact, people looked so cheerful and contented that one might have imagined that all the discontented people had been carted off to detention camps. And I cannot imagine anything better for the morale of a nation that all the discontented grouse and grumblers and agitators should be carted off to isolated places where they can grouse at one another till they are sick of grouching.²¹⁸

One may wonder, given Grey's constant antagonizing of the British government and complaining about British society, if he recognized that under such rules, he would have been among those sent to the camps.

Beyond Grey's own tours or those mentioned regularly in his journal, other prominent British pro-fascists were given air tours of Germany. One of the most important of these was the former British Air Minister, Lord Londonderry. Embarrassed at having recently been eased out of the Government, Londonderry was anxious to become involved once again in meaningful foreign affairs. Informal diplomacy with the Germans, who were actively seeking understanding with British right-wing VIP's, presented an opportunity. Given his background as Minister for Air, he was able to arrange a visit for himself and his family by airplane. This allowed him to observe Germany's growing air presence first hand. Londonderry spends nearly thirty pages describing this trip, which made a powerful impression upon him, in his book Ourselves and Germany (1937). His recounting includes a description of the Junker plane which took the Londonderry family to Germany, and the air officers he met on arrival. He also goes on to describe the newly established airfields in detail as well as the Air Staff College then under construction. Of the Staff College he said, "the buildings which have been constructed in the last year and are nearing completion...are artistically constructed and completely up-to-date...I visited the classrooms, lecture halls, a small wind tunnel, electricity demonstration plant, diesel engines etc. etc."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 247-248.

²¹⁹ Londonderry, Ourselves and Germany, p.81-82.

Londonderry went on to visit Air Minister Goering at his palace, toured the new Luftwaffe fields, rode in Goering's personal airplane, and visited the Junker manufacturing plant. This plant was producing the new Juno V diesel engine, and to Londonderry, "the layout and organization appeared to me to be of a very high order." He thought that the Germans had embraced the most modern practices, as its manager "had studied business methods in America, and he had also been to China."²²⁰ Londonderry downplayed or did not recognize the menace he was witnessing, saying that even though the production of these planes and engines were outstripping Germany's current needs, "great efforts are being made to develop the export trade." This observation ignored the fact that civil airplanes could be easily converted for military use if the need arose. He remained consistent in his inability to acknowledge the extent to which Germany's air expansion was a threat to world security. His "air tour" ended up with a climactic visit to the Fuhrer, and then with a week at the Winter Olympics.

Urban Planning and Architecture

The 1936 Olympic Games in Germany made a significant impression on many British visitors, extreme right wing or otherwise. One way that it did so was certainly through its conscious effort to dazzle the world through ceremony, symbols and of course lavish hospitality. Part of that project was the construction of massive modern facilities which the world's athletes, press and visitors could observe.

Among British fascists to comment directly on this new architecture was Anne Brock Griggs, member of the women's branch of the BUF and East End campaigner. She wrote a column in *Action* titled "Stirring Berlin Scenes: Anne Brock Griggs Describes the Magnificent Setting

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

Berlin has Built for the Olympic Games.” The story included aerial views of the new main stadium and of the ultra-modern looking “Olympic Village,” for housing the athletes. The photo of the village showed a geometrically designed complex of houses radiating out in a circle from the central facilities along straight avenues. Griggs waxed poetically about the new Berlin, its aesthetics, and its ability to accommodate new thresholds of attendance:

For months past work and activity in Germany have concentrated on this great meeting. Not only the labour of the nation, but the intellectual ability of German genius have concentrated on giving a magnificent and memorable welcome to the guests... To-day a very different Germany will welcome the guests of other nations. The old stadium, which would have been big enough for 1916, is far too small for the vast crowds which will flock to Berlin... Therefore, the Chancellor, Herr Hitler, always to the fore in making a grand gesture towards a true internationalism based on realism, has ordered to be built a mighty arena, which will hold 100,000 spectators! The first view of this stadium is breathtaking in its simplicity... Germany has here created a new tribute to reawakened energy, directed by the brilliance of her designers... the surrounding grounds... have been laid out with the simplicity and the genius for utilizing every possible corner of space that distinguishes German workmanship... The open air theater... is the direct answer to those who assert that the Nazi regime would crush the cultural aspect of the nation. On the contrary it is stimulated into new life, which while it respects tradition, is not a slave to it.²²¹

Several of the British visitors to Germany in this period described and photographed the Olympic facilities. Christopher Sidgwick was another who was amazed by the building of the Olympic Stadium, saying that “little is being spared in the way of cost or impressiveness.” But he was especially impressed by the practicality of the Olympic Village, recognizing its value to the nation and its connection with National Socialist values. He wrote, “Here again this is no temporary erection. When the international games are over the various bungalows will be used by the Army as an officer’s training camp... when a bout of international playing is over, they will get on with the business of nationalism.”²²²

²²¹ Anne Brock Griggs, “Stirring Berlin Scenes,” *Action*, August 6, 1936, p.7.

²²² Sidgwick, *German Journey*, pp. 106-107.

Commentary on Germany's new architecture, however, extended beyond Berlin. The historical buildings of Germany certainly were enchanting, with plaster and timber fronts complimented by colorful flower boxes. But what seemed to make the greatest impression on Britons was the rapid expansion of clean and practical new facilities for modern purposes. In his description of Hamburg, for instance, Hillson marveled at the pace of the new being built on top of the old. In the city centre, "there have arisen some of the most elaborate and up-to-date office buildings in Europe on the site of the picturesque old merchants' mansions." Downtown Hamburg, he said, was like a new world:

Here is a riot of modern German architecture; one can walk for more than half a mile between tall structures rising to twelve floors that are a revelation of time-saving and simplicity of design. Here are to be found buildings that are famous throughout the world of commerce – the Ballin House, the Chile House, the Sprinkenhof Building, the Mohlenhof Building, and the Karstadt Building. In Berlin, the eager Berliner, anxious to demonstrate the modernity of the capital, invites the stranger to step along to the enormous Shell House, the last word in office architecture. But the Hamburgers can show the stranger a whole section of the city devoted to such experiments in building.²²³

Beyond the buildings themselves, Hillson was impressed by the modern looking transports and infrastructures that reminded him of America: "Overhead railways everywhere. A Clatter of half a hundred tramcars. Tens of thousands of men and women all in a hurry...All strangely reminiscent of New York..."²²⁴ Domville-Fife was equally impressed with the architecture of Hamburg and its relationship to Germany's new perceived progressivism. Of his tour down Moncheberg Street he wrote that the building "effectively disposes of any preconceived notion that the city's age has been allowed to interfere with its progress. Hamburg is essentially

²²³ Hillson, *I Speak of Germany*, p. 172.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

maritime and commercial, but somehow these modern characteristics seem to walk hand in hand with a certain measure of art and culture.”²²⁵

Robert Hastings saw in Germany’s new rush of building, the will of the people and a deeper meaning of Nazism for the common man. Many of the building lots he saw were housing projects for ordinary Germans and for slum clearance. Concentrating on these constructions, he saw connections between the modern style and his ideas about the values of Germany’s political system. To him, the modernized architecture reflected an increasing democratization. Looking at German architecture’s new simplicity of line and emphasis on function, he wrote:

For the first time in the international history of an art impulse, the trend did not come from above, from the castles of the rulers, but from the people, from the masses. The demand may have come before but it had remained unnoticed and neglected. Now, with the new democratic tendency the National Socialist has a right to voice his claims, a power to insist on the fulfillment of his just requests, and so we have a house, a settlement, an allotment built in accordance with the needs of working humanity. Architecture should be a representation of reality and of the artistic feeling of the age. If the new German architecture conforms to this belief, then this new simplicity in style, this single style for the houses of the wealthy and the smaller houses or settlements of the poorer members of the community, reveals a unity of life – a cohesion, a linking of all sections of the nation, the veritable triumph of the N.S. principles.²²⁶

Medicine and Medical Care

Another of the improvements of fascist nations which caught the attention of British far right observers was the new development in health care and medicine. New hospitals, especially in Germany, seemed to Britons cleaner, better equipped, and their nurses better trained than in Britain. Medical care seemed the most fundamental expression of how, under fascism, the national welfare took precedence over private profit interests and political party wrangling. The state had taken the very health of its people in hand.

²²⁵ Domville-Fife, This is Germany, pp. 149-150.

²²⁶ Robert Hastings, The Changing Face of Germany (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1934), pp. 161-162.

First of all, they believed, ordinary workers had better access to health care than Britons. F. T. Cooper (writing as Frederick Edwardes), in *Germany and You* wrote an article applauding the new German program for workers' health care and compared it favorably with Britain's. He described Hitler's coming project thus: "The German Ministry of Health recently announced that all workers employed in industry in Hamburg, Kurheisen, Cologne, Aachen and Eastern Bavaria should undergo a complete medical examination during the course of the next three years... This system of medical examinations will be extended to cover all workers throughout the country and finally they will undergo a thorough examination annually... This is the greatest task that has ever been undertaken in the medical care of a nation."²²⁷ The Ministry pursuing this project, said Cooper, was taking a rationalized approach in attempting to find connections between factory conditions and particular diseases. The examinations, he said, "will be preceded by visits to factories and works in order that the doctors may see the conditions under which the employees work. The object will be to discover where workers are suffering from disabilities brought on by their occupations."²²⁸

Such projects were one focus. Another was the advanced condition of German hospitals. British observers believed the actual care provided, once a citizen had access, was also superior. For Conservative M.P. Arnold Wilson, touring Germany in February 1938, the Huysens Hospital was an example for the world. The entire facility, he said, was "a masterpiece of architectural planning." And the rooms had been equipped with the most modern equipment: "There were headphones for all beds and a bell to summon the nurses... and it was thoroughly

²²⁷F. E. Cooper writing as Frederick Edwardes, "Health Care in the New Germany," *Germany and You*, Vol. IV, No. 4, (un-numbered clipping from the papers of F.E. Cooper, University of Sheffield).

²²⁸ Ibid.

equipped with labour-saving appliances and telephones. I felt that even our newest hospitals had something to learn here.”²²⁹ After continuing to describe the hospital he moved to Germany’s emerging results of the advances in health care. What followed was a lengthy recitation of statistics such as “Between 1925 and 1935 deaths in Germany from tuberculosis in all forms fell from 66,505 to 48,679; typhus from 1,697 to 572; measles from 6,858 to 1,701; whooping cough from 6,299 to 1,820...etc.”²³⁰

Francis Yeats-Brown in European Jungle, was impressed to find hospitals in Germany which de-emphasized artificial medicine and promoted organic cures. While some might see this as an anti-modern feature of German medicine, Yeats-Brown perceived it as a new approach. At the Rudolf Hess Hospital he wrote, “in this hospital a synthesis of old and new ideas in medicine is being attempted. Of course, Nature Cure is as old as Hippocrates, but it is new in the sense that it had been neglected by the orthodox physicians of Germany (as it has been in other countries) with the consequence that until recently...more than half the sick people in the Reich were being treated by quacks.”²³¹

The quality of nursing was also a recurring theme among British tourists. Hastings devoted a full section of his The Changing Face of Germany to the subject. He was especially pleased with the fact that German nurses were required to pass examinations to move into the profession:

For all nurses and those wishing to enter the nursing profession, a course in domestic science is recommended, and this should be taken if possible before entering upon the hospital training proper. Until recent years nurses were not required to pass any examinations, but now every probationer...must pass a test theoretical and practical...All

²²⁹ Arnold Wilson, More Thoughts and Talks (London: Longman’s Green Co., 1939), p. 35.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.37.

²³¹ Francis Yeats-Brown, European Jungle, p. 154.

nurses are encouraged to specialize in some department of surgical or medical science, in children's diseases or in women's complaints.²³²

This increase in the quality of nursing through training had the happy concomitant, said Hastings, in the German government's bettering of nurse's working conditions. A group of new labor laws had been passed "improving the conditions and hours of service of nurses and sisters in the state hospitals. These regulations stipulate that each nurse shall have a certain free time each day." He then added, in a surprisingly positive tone "she need have little fear of dismissal if she is of Aryan parentage, and if she maintains a correct attitude towards the N.S. Government."²³³

Anyone who has studied Nazi Germany is aware that there was a terrifying dark side to Nazi medicine that was deeply integrated with Hitler's programs for racial purification. It included state programs to sterilize the "unfit," and to euthanize the mentally and physically handicapped.²³⁴ On this topic most British promoters of fascism were silent, but a few found positive things to say about this scientific approach to racial hygiene. One of these was Michael Fry. In Hitler's Wonderland he defended racial purification as a "revolutionary" idea whose time had come. It is necessary to quote Fry at length:

One of the new laws based on the idea of Kameradschaft is the Sterilization Law. I choose it from among many others because it seems the most revolutionary measure ever adopted by any large nation. The new law came into effect on January 1, 1934, when all arrangements had been completed for the sterilization of 400,000 unfit men and women... The costs of carrying out this gigantic programme were estimated at about 10 million marks inasmuch as the operations cost 20 marks for the men and 50 marks for the

²³² Hastings, The Changing Face of Germany, p.47.

²³³ Ibid., pp.48-49.

²³⁴ For the best investigation of these programs, see Robert Proctor, Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

women... They hope to regain part of their expenditure from the saving in the Health Insurance Fund²³⁵

After discussing the financial accounting of race purification he moves to the moral issues of racial hygiene and its supposed merit in the modern world. His reasoning moves from cost-effectiveness to a perverted social Darwinism:

The law raises an interesting question. Do the civilized races really need a compulsory clean up or is Hitler tilting at a windmill? One answer is that if Germany alone spends 170 million marks a year on the care of congenitally unfit citizens, how much do all the nations of the world spend for the same cause? Probably millions or billions of dollars, pounds, francs, pesetas and yens – billions which might as well be thrown into the ocean, for all the good they do humanity. It does not matter that congenitally fit men and women are out of employment and starving as long as idiots, lunatics, and alcoholics are able to live for sixty years at the State's expense...Generations of men and women have suffered from the effect of wars and plagues and they have transmitted their diseases to their offspring...Men whose blood is corrupted by syphilis, alcoholism, and phthisis are allowed to have as many children as they please, although some of these will be born blind or idiots or paralytics and subsequently become a burden on the State. Five thousand years ago the problem of race deterioration was of no great importance. In those days there were still opportunities for different tribes of the same race to mingle and thus strengthen the common blood. But, today where in the world can the white man find fresh, vigorous blood except by going to the yellow or black races? Fresh blood is needed to prevent the white race from becoming deteriorated; if there are no sources of regeneration left then an effort should at least be made to prevent the existing race from becoming further disintegrated. Germany is making that attempt within the limits of her boundaries; but it is a question which concerns all the countries inhabited by white men.²³⁶

It was chilling attitudes like these that lay behind some positive reviews of Nazi medicine and prompted comments like those from Yeats-Brown who said about Hitler, "And what has the master done in his house? For one thing, he has changed the face of Germany. Literally, the face."²³⁷

²³⁵ Fry, Hitler's Wonderland, p.142.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

²³⁷ Yeats-Brown, European Jungle, p. 154.

Modernizing the Colonies

Nazi Germany during the interwar years had no colonies in the formal sense though Hitler did, of course, annex adjoining territory directly into the Reich. Italy, however, developed and enlarged its Empire in the Mediterranean and then in Africa during this period. British fascists and pro-fascists never tired of celebrating Mussolini, and his imperialism provided no exception. The extreme right press regularly endorsed Italy's invasion of Abyssinia from 1935 until the beginning of the War. Typically these endorsements were based on convictions that Italy was providing a valuable service in bringing civilization to a barbarous land. Predictably, the British fascist press was the most strident in this regard, often depicting the Abyssinians as murderous slave traders. But, in virtually all far right publications Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, despite its appalling methods, was seen as a positive development. Given this attitude, most far right commentators were also appalled at Britain's participation in League of Nations economic sanctions, feeling they would only damage Britain in the long run. Finally, many wrote of their admiration for Mussolini's invasion based on his project of modernization. The new construction of European-style infrastructures going up in Abyssinia impressed several on Britain's far right and reinforced their belief that Italy was justified in its conquest.

Before Abyssinia, some had complimented the Fascists on their modernizing work in Libya. Reverend Robertson included Mussolini's work in Libya in his praise for the Italian development of the Mediterranean, writing, "He developed the country's mercantile marine into a serious competitor to all other shipping...He multiplied Italian fortified bases in the Mediterranean, subdued the Arab tribes of in the interior of Libya, and equipped that colony with delightful Riviera-like towns and splendid roads."²³⁸ Even an active M.P. like Arnold Wilson, who dared

²³⁸ Robertson, *Mussolini and the New Italy*, p. 253.

not publicly applaud Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia too loudly, said "I cannot withhold my admiration of the achievements of the Fascist Government in Libya..."²³⁹

When extreme right authors spoke about Mussolini in Abyssinia, they were even more delighted with Italy's modernization of the land. C. M. Cresswell, author of The Keystone of Fascism in the 1920's, provided some coverage of the Italian colonization for the BUF's *Action*. He wrote specifically discussing the preparations for auto transport in his article, "Roman Roads in Abyssinia: C.M. Cresswell Describes the Marvel of Modern Italian Road Making in East Africa." His first premise was in support of Italy's "civilizing mission": "Abyssinia shows that the first thing necessary to civilize the country is an adequate system of communications ... Abyssinia is crying out for redemption and no one except Italy (least of all the Negus...) ever thought of taking the place seriously."²⁴⁰ He described the "heroic" march of the Italians into the undeveloped wildernesses travelling on a path "which is no more than a mule track"; and at the head of the pack marched the courageous engineers who quite literally paved the way. While the soldiers were brave, "ahead of them, and under shelter of the machine guns, came the engineers, to blast, hew, and stamp out a one-way road just wide enough to take a lorry."²⁴¹ After these early, dangerous projects, engineers could return to reconstruct roads which were "permanent, asphalted, and wherever possible straight and level...if necessary it skirts mountain sides and is carried magnificently over gulleys and torrents by bridges."²⁴² Eventually, said Cresswell, using language that reflected many European attitudes about the darkness of Africa, at night "in the

²³⁹ Wilson, Thoughts and Talks Abroad, p.v

²⁴⁰ C. M. Cresswell, "Roman Roads in Abyssinia," *Action*, May 14, 1936, p. 10.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.10.

darkness, when the savage yet glorious African scenery is hidden, you might think yourself upon a first class road in Europe, except that a frightened hyena may cross your path...”²⁴³

The lengthiest commentary on the Italian modernization of Abyssinia was a book written by E. M. Polson-Newman, a retired military man. He was a committed pro-fascist, who worked in his retirement to produce propaganda for Mussolini’s regime in Britain. He had secured permission from an interview with Mussolini himself, to visit Abyssinia and report back to Britons the progress which Fascism was making in the new colony. Polson-Newman noted that he would be in a unique position to bring back honest, un-edited reports, because “as an independent worker, I would have no editorial policy to consider. I could give the British public the truth as I saw it.”²⁴⁴ His memoir, The New Abyssinia (1938), is filled with reflections of the rough terrain, the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia, and to a great degree, impressions of the Italian modernization. After a day on the barren African plateaus, Asmara was “a blaze of light, a cloud of dust, and an incessant rattle of motor transport.”²⁴⁵ He was especially interested, like Cresswell, in the Italian faith in motor travel and its infrastructures. Of the road to Addis Ababa he wrote: “The Italians, however, are great believers in motor transport owing to its flexibility and seemed much more interested in the road they were building from Assab...than in the railway projects.” These roads stood out for their newness and sleek design in the middle of the dusty plains. He wrote, “...Before reaching Makalle we had passed bridges being built and were surprised to find such modern and up-to-date designs in a countryside so remote...white concrete

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁴⁴ E. M. Polson-Newman, The New Abyssinia (London: Rich and Cowan, 1938), p. 15.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.21.

erections of a most elaborate and permanent appearance.”²⁴⁶ He also reported on the growing motor culture in Abyssinia and the Italian infatuation with engines and automobiles. He told the story of a high speed motor race in which his wife and he were unwilling participants:

At one point of the road our chauffeur spotted a small Fiat turning the corner well ahead. As soon as he discovered that it was a Fiat “Balilla” his pride in his “Arditi” made it imperative that the “Balilla” should eat the dust! When the throttle was opened out we were profoundly thankful not to be in a mountainous region. On we rushed at an ever increasing pace, but the “Balilla” did the same...But to be beaten by a “Balilla” was a terrible humiliation for an “Arditi,” for the Italians are *very* mechanically minded...They seemed to take the whole matter as seriously as if their whole futures depended upon the result.²⁴⁷

Polson-Newman went on to describe the other communication systems going up in Abyssinia. These included the scheduled steam ship service and the brand new motor coaches which “carried twenty six passengers, and the one we saw was fitted with wireless, cocktail bar and lavatory.” Other projects included the telephone service which, Polson-Newman suggested, was struggling as a result of being reliant upon private companies for development. By contrast, the state run telegraph system “had been set up throughout the country, so that even the smallest posts had these facilities.”²⁴⁸ He included comments on the beginnings of industrial production as well, noting that factories had already been established mostly for primary goods and construction materials. Industrial production was clearly limited in this early phase, but “what struck us most about all this sort of enterprise...was the rapidity with which the Italians made the fullest use of such natural resources as they came across, and the skill with which they produced from the most up-to-date material. There was nothing amateurish about anything they did...”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶Ibid., p.77, 96.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p.160.

Despite all the other advances, though, Polson-Newman approved of the Italians concentrating the great majority of their efforts on the roads and other communications networks. Farming would have to wait. This, according to Polson-Newman, showed that the Italians were moving with “scientific caution,” taking one task at a time. After all, he said, “colonization depends on road construction.”²⁵⁰

Reality or Façade?: Were Extreme Right Observers Dupes?

Did the impressions of far right commentators reflect fascist reality? Had the dictatorships really mastered modern science and technology, creating nationalist wonderlands? As we have seen, rather exhaustively, these far right politicians, journalists and travel writers were often dazzled by the dictators’ great engineering projects. The logic and efficiency of the autobahn or the neatly ordered workers’ dormitories might seem to present (literally) concrete evidence for such an argument. But, just as often, the grand works of fascist dictators masked the *limits* of their own modernization as well as their brutality. There is now a weight of scholarly work that investigates such fascist “accomplishments,” and finds they often covered a darker and/or inefficient reality. To demonstrate this, we shall examine two of the fascist achievements most celebrated by British far right visitors: the recovery of the Pontine Marshes in Italy and the operations of the Labor Front in Nazi Germany.

The Pontine Marshes and the War on Malaria

No fascist project received more credit in British far right discourse, than the reclamation of the Pontine Marsh area outside Rome and the victory it supposedly represented over malaria. Mussolini was hailed time and again for his unprecedented accomplishment, and the Pontine

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

project singled out as evidence of the fascists' mastery of modernity. Frank Snowden, however, has recently published work which pulls the veil off the Pontine project. The problem of malaria had long plagued Italy, especially in the South and in the great marshlands near Rome. There, the swampy conditions bred malarial mosquitoes, and made the area too deadly for agriculture or settlement. Successive regimes, dating back to the ancient Romans, had attempted to deal with the problem, but to no avail. Mussolini, however, claimed to focus all the power of modern science in tackling the problem. It began with his coordinated, overarching project to eradicate malaria. In that pursuit, Snowden reveals, Mussolini's doctors committed a series of unpardonable crimes in treating malarial victims with mercury; this despite changing medical opinion, which rightly saw mercury as extremely harmful. Mussolini extended the project into plans to eliminate the environments for malaria. He attacked the Pontine swamps, employing thousands of destitute laborers who had been impoverished by the global depression after 1929. In clearing the swamps, workman sickened and died in the thousands, while their hygiene, housing, and food was ill managed. Mussolini was unmoved by the casualties, looking at the situation in military terms: it was a dangerous mission and soldiers would die in the fight. As Snowden writes, "From the Fascist perspective, such suffering was inevitable and unimportant."²⁵¹ When the swamps had been reasonably drained, a number of modern buildings were constructed, as well as fabricated farm houses. Migrants were shipped in, especially from the North of Italy, to take up residence, plant fields, and carry on Mussolini's "Battle for grain." What was particularly important to Mussolini, however, was that he had created a grand, tangible, and visually powerful project. With its completion, the formal work on malaria

²⁵¹ Frank M. Snowden, The Conquest of Malaria: Italy 1900 – 1962. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 158.

stopped, having made only marginal progress, while the modern façade of Littoria (a newly planned town on Pontine land) was exploited for propaganda in Italy and to the world. The “principle objective, of course, was to provide a dazzling display of power in a highly visible location,” which would “attract the attention of the whole world.”²⁵² With his propaganda tool firmly in place – and visitors like Mosley were clearly overwhelmed – Mussolini considered the war on malaria won.

But, malaria raged on, especially in the South. Competent scientists, like Guiseppe Sanarelli, knew it well and called for formal scientific study on a number of gaps in malaria research. Issues like “relapses, immunity, the over-wintering of mosquitoes, the mechanism of quinine, spontaneous cures, quinine intolerance, and drug resistance,” Snowden tells us, were still misunderstood. Sanarelli called for systematic research into these problems. But, Italy lacked the appropriate facilities for such research and the government was unwilling to allocate funds for such science. As far as Mussolini was concerned, victory had already been achieved.

In his view, which gave no importance to the long term, science had already done enough. The “great doctor,” who had received no training in science, believed that the time for discussion and research was finished. All that was still needed was the indomitable will that would put what was already known into practice. The search for new knowledge was a wasteful diversion.²⁵³

This was neither the modern spirit of scientific inquiry nor modern efficiency.

The Labor Front (DAF) in Nazi Germany

Another of the favorite examples of authoritarian efficiency in British pro-fascist writing was the new favorable condition for German workers under Hitler. The Fuhrer had taken the Italian Corporatist model and modified it for the Nazi state. The organization that had evolved

²⁵² Ibid., p. 162.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 178.

after several experiments was the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF) or in English the German Labor Front. This organization was designed to represent German workers by regulating factory conditions, assuring good relations on the shop floor, providing programs for workers' leisure activities (through the "Strength through Joy" program), and to prosecute employer violations of German work codes. With a state-sponsored agency like this, the worker was supposedly fully represented in the national effort to wrest Germany from the grips of depression. British pro-fascists referred to it time and again and often lamented that such an approach had not been taken in Britain where labor strife seemed to be strangling growth. The old, supposedly outdated and destructive, tools of labor had been eliminated: Socialist and Communist parties terminated by law, labor unions made illegal, and strikes outlawed. But, with labor's own state agency (theoretically) working together with the employers' groups, Germany, much like Italy, was moving forward to eliminate class conflict.

While this was the general impression reflected in British far right writing, historian Tim Mason closely examined the DAF's performance and found a quite different reality. Mason, an acknowledged master of German primary sources, published his important book Social Policy and the Third Reich: The Working Class and the National Community in 1977. It remains a classic study which helped dispel the myth of Nazi efficiency. Mason's was a wider study which examined the full range of relations between the working class and the Nazi state, but a central feature of that study was the nature and performance of the DAF.

The Nazi relationship with the working class was flawed from the outset, said Mason, due to a fundamental paradox in Hitler's vision for modern Germany. The Fuhrer was obsessed with creating a completely unified nation, with all citizens sharing Nazi aims and attitudes. At same time, however, Hitler held the masses in contempt and felt strongly that they were not politically

trustworthy. Therefore, his policies continually aimed to crush the revolutionary potential out of the working class, while also aiming to make them part of the “National Community.” The result was a continual string of half measures, inconsistent policies, and toothless organizations: a bizarre mix of suppression and reward. Oppressive measures came swiftly after Hitler took power with opposition parties shut down, labor leaders arrested, and strikes prohibited. But, eventually Hitler created the DAF for labor representation and care of the worker. In the early years of the regime Hitler found workers more malleable and his oppressive policies supposedly more effective. The reasons for this, said Mason, had far more to do with depression conditions than with any actual support from the working class. With wages precariously low and jobs extremely scarce, workers were terrified of any form of protest lest they lose what little they had. As Mason wrote, “The German working class movement was broken on the wheel of the world economic crisis.”²⁵⁴ The DAF that might have given them actual representation at the state level, however, never evolved to provide any meaningful aid to workers’ conditions. Reflecting Hitler’s own confusion in his essential mission, the DAF never formed a clear direction. The agency aided Hitler’s propaganda efforts by adjusting unemployment figures. They would no longer reflect part time worker statistics and so Hitler could claim real progress in tackling the unemployment problem. For workers to have access to DAF representation they were required to become members and pay membership fees; the DAF was eventually forced to pay for its own existence through such fees. Still the DAF offered none of the fringe benefits of the old labor unions. Those who showed any indications of dissent were expelled from the DAF and thus would have no hope whatsoever of keeping or landing a job. On top of all of this, the DAF received very little support from Hitler himself. As is now well documented, Hitler took almost

²⁵⁴ Tim Mason, Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the National Community. (Oxford: Berg, 1977), p. 87.

no direct action in the relations between government departments. They were left to fight each other for influence, territory and funding. Such was the case with the DAF.

When the DAF, despite its unclear mission, would take action on behalf of workers against employers it was compromised yet again. Hitler had made rearmament and national economic self-sufficiency his number one priorities in the years after 1935. Thus, when the DAF sited large employers (who were nearly all somehow involved in national rearmament), the state prohibited any action that would penalize them. Thus, the DAF was confined to actions against small businesses and workshops, which produced no meaningful benefit to workers on the grand scale. The result of the muddled and compromised nature of the DAF was that workers were keenly aware of their lack of support in the Nazi state. According to Mason, workers were thus never converted to Nazi ideology and Hitler's dream of the "victory within," was woefully incomplete. This would become visibly apparent in the late 1930's and as war began. By the later stages of rearmament, the German economy had reached virtual full employment and the workers now found themselves with inherently increased leverage – a leverage they used. While formal strikes were prohibited, actions like slow-downs were common and mass sick-time movements were used to force worker demands. Productivity was in fact dramatically down by 1939 and Germany would enter the war without the weapon levels actually needed for the war and without the levels of production that would be needed in the years ahead. Germany's early string of victories helped to perpetuate the myth of the super-efficient Nazi war machine, but the truth, says Mason, was quite different. The failure to bring workers into the Nazi fold and their variety of creative protests meant that Hitler was never armed to the point where victory was a

realistic objective. As Mason wrote, “the Second World War was lost for Germany before it started.”²⁵⁵

It would appear that British pro-fascists, who were so impressed by fascist modernity, were in fact mistaken about a great many things. In their defense, some of the modern marvels were indeed impressive such as modern highways or 100 mph trains. Also, they did not have the access, for the most part, to examine projects like the Pontine Marshes with any kind of critical penetration. But, their writings also reflect a predisposition to see such projects in a favorable light. On questions like the potential of German work camps to be proto-military training areas, they dismissed such ideas without any critical consideration. These writers were also prone to see enormous, gleaming technology as innately beneficial – despite the inefficiency, manipulation, and brutality it often disguised. It made criticism of Britain’s lack of such “national” projects easier and added to the decline-oriented argument of the extreme right. As we shall see, such laudatory treatment of fascist technology and engineering would be used as a benchmark by which to measure the British state.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

CHAPTER FIVE

“SHEER BARNACLE HABITS OF MIND”

Technological Modernity and the Extreme Right’s Attack on British Democracy

The extreme right’s political agenda was highly concerned with the developing issues of high technology. From building rational road systems to the re-engineering of broadcast radio, from developing civil aviation, to the construction of a great Channel Tunnel, the extreme right was wringing its hands over Britain’s lagging position in the race for technological modernity. And it pressed quite vocally for measures to catch it up. In that effort, many on the far right were confronted by what they saw as British stubbornness in the face of drastic change. Their pleas for technological modernization were expressed in tones of desperation and exasperation. For them, Parliament and the Labour and National Governments were clearly the worst offenders in this area.

The individuals in these Governments, they suggested, were simply creations of an outdated political system. Liberal democracy seemed to reward only those who could avoid change, avoid risk, and make no waves within their party. These “old men” or the “old guard,” had become obstacles to progress. Using the language of technological metaphor once again, W. E. D. Allen outlined the extreme right’s task, depicting Labour’s version of socialism as:

An 1840 chassis with a 1900 body, missing on all cylinders, running on inferior gas. The young men must build something in its place, as different from the old contraption as an aeroplane is from a balloon. We have two big first things to do. We have to loosen up the mechanism of distribution in this country, so that men and women will no longer be turned away from the machines which they can use to make the things they need. And then we have to prove that the future of the nation will not be found in sleeping cars whose destination is Geneva (Headquarters of the League of Nations), but across the sky-routes of Empire.

The Liberal-Democratic system was the problem, said Britain’s fascists and pro-fascists, and they attacked it in their personal correspondence, their political campaigns, and their press.

Science, Fascism, and the Left

While it is important to recognize that the extreme right increasingly confronted issues of science and technology, it is also necessary to understand that the left generally did the same. Both political tendencies seized upon those issues as critical political battlefields for debate. As we shall see in the following sections, the far right positioned itself (often using continental fascists as examples), as the only movement capable of pushing Britain forward. The left, on the other hand, focused on these same issues to *discredit* fascism. The Socialist left believed intensely in the value of industry, planned economies, and mechanization regulated by the state. They, of course, most often looked to the Soviet Union as the best example of modernization – a modernization which supposedly did not trample upon the workers. Fascists may have filled their rhetoric with references to science and technology, said Britain’s left wing, but theirs was not a formula for progress. The corruption of scientific objectivity and the use of big technology to crush the individual was part of the essence of fascist authoritarianism. The result, said left wing commentators, was not a path to modernity, but a regression into barbarism.

One of the most eloquent statements to this effect, was a book by Robert A. Brady, The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism, published in 1934. The book, with a “Foreword” by the Labour economist, Harold Laski, sought to prove the general socialist interpretation of fascism – that, to use Laski’s words, “Fascism is nothing but monopoly capitalism imposing its will on those masses whom it has deliberately transformed into slaves.”²⁵⁶ To make this argument, Brady took an anatomical approach to the Nazi regime, identifying its key leaders, government departments, and ties to big capital. But, significantly, he began his book with a chapter entitled, “Science, Handmaiden of Inspired Truth.” This opening chapter dissected the Nazi’s approach

²⁵⁶ Harold J. Laski, “Foreword” in Robert A. Brady, The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism, (New York: Viking, 1937), p. xiii.

to science and their conviction that science should not be objective, but should serve the state.

The Nazis understood well, however, said Brady, that science commanded respect and lent credibility to any policy. As he wrote,

Its influence reaches far beyond laboratory and factory walls and out into the world outlook of every man and woman on the street...it is accepted as the wonder-working Aladdin's lamp by practically all, regardless of rank or station...By "coordinating" it to Nazi ends they could capitalize on the childlike faith with which science was accepted by both the educated and the ignorant. By calling any body of doctrine, however irrational and self-contradictory, "science," they have been able to cast a glow of impartial sanctity around that which they seek to promote.²⁵⁷

Understanding the persuasive power of science and technology, the Nazis sought to break the objectivity of the scientific community and "coordinate" those efforts into supporting Nazi projects. To accomplish this, said Brady, the Nazi's had sought to prove two new principles: "There is no such thing as scientific 'objectivity' and ... There is no such thing as non-national, or 'universally valid' science; all science is *nationally determined* as to form, content and method."²⁵⁸ From these new set of unsettling principles, then, the Nazis had set about developing new areas of pseudo-science like blood-territory ties, and racial sciences. They had persuaded doctors to embrace the national goals of "racial hygiene" and had "justified" the purge of Jews from the scientific community. Jews, of course, were prone to ideas of "universal science," precisely because they supposedly had no nation.

John Strachey made similar points about the corruption of science and industry in his book The Menace of Fascism, published in 1933. Strachey was a Labour MP who had left the party to join Mosley in the early days of the New Party in 1931. He was particularly drawn to Mosley's formulas for state planning and social programs for labor. After Mosley's turn toward fascism,

²⁵⁷ Robert A. Brady, The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism, p. 32-3.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

however, Strachey ended his support and affiliation. He shared the view that fascism was simply capitalism turning to regimes of terror to fend off socialist revolution. In its essence, he believed, fascism meant violence and brutal imperialism. He also dealt with the question of fascist progressivism in his chapter “A Fascist Future?” And here he doubtless pointed his analysis directly at Mosley and the BUF dream of an autarkic economy. It was particularly the pursuit of industrial insularity, said Strachey, which would block the road forward. As he said, “the ideal of autarchy, or economic self-sufficiency, for each nation-state conflicts with the continuance of modern civilization. It requires a general lowering of the standard of life, a gradual return for all humanity to the endless drudgery, the darkness, ignorance and superstition of peasant life.”²⁵⁹ Here Strachey went on to quote the work of Professor Scott Nearing, an anti-capitalist American social scientist. His analysis of fascism targeted its misguided search for industrial independence. While the scientific and engineering communities were hard at work building new factories, technical marvels and chemical substitutes for raw materials, they were sowing the seeds for the collapse of modern society:

The search for a self-sufficient economic unit will lead the fascists, as it led those of their predecessors who helped liquidate the Roman Empire, to a splitting up of economic units until they reach the village, the manor and the local market town. Village economy is almost self-sufficient...there is no unit which can pretend to true economic self-sufficiency...Automatic machinery will be abandoned with the abandonment of mass production. The village will rely on hand-agriculture and handcrafts. Railroads will disappear. Roads will be tracks through the mud. Automobiles will vanish. Bridges will be destroyed in the course of the constantly recurring wars and military expeditions and forays...If this picture seems fantastic to a modern American or European, let him compare Roman imperial economy in 50 A.D. with the economy of the same territory in 650 A. D.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ John Strachey, The Menace of Fascism, (New York: Covici Friede, 1933), p. 134.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 134-5.

Clearly, to the left, the fascist approach to science and technology represented reaction and anti-modernism. But, they acknowledged, this was not easily apparent. Protection of one nation's industry would seem to be a way of facilitating industrial growth and progress. Great machine works and engineering projects, even if military, could be remarkably persuasive. Volumes of biology books might lend a modern touch to policies of racial cleansing. The British left was well aware of the extreme right's stream of praise for fascist modern accomplishments, like those reviewed in the previous chapter. But, said Brady, the corrupted version of scientific work was just the kind of "science which the Nazis strive with all their resources in their power to "put across" with foreigners." With scientific and technological charades they could and did, "make their position *seem* ultra-modern."²⁶¹ British extreme right journalists, technicians and travel writers were dupes, in other words, tricked by the calculated effort of fascist propagandists. Anyone travelling to the fascist nations, needed to look more carefully and be on their guard:

Consequently, nowhere else in the entire Nazi propaganda program is it so necessary to be wide awake to subtle turns of phrase and underlying intent. Careful examination will show that while much of what they have to say about science sounds quite plausible, the net effect of their program is to turn modern science into pseudo-Aryan mysticism and magic.²⁶²

But, Britain's pro-fascist community did not see it that way. They saw in the fascist dictatorships tangible evidence of progress. They saw increased efficiency, expansion of production, and, of course, the ultra-modern technology. But, they also believed they saw evidence in the form of happier people, cleaner cities, and the reduction of human misery. Could Britain's liberal-democracy, socialist or not, provide such evidence? The answer from the

²⁶¹ Brady, The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism, p. 34.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

extreme right was increasingly “no,” and so they used such comparisons as they attacked the parliamentary system at home.

The Workers

British far right authors who brought back reports of such splendid achievements in Italy and Germany did not generally see the same kind of progress happening in their own country. After the tales of impressive new housing for workers, improved factory conditions, and modern national infrastructures, these authors compared them to conditions in Britain. Very often they saw Britain on the deficit side. Italian and German workers may have been losing their individual freedoms and control of their own labor organizations, but ignoring this, the far right emphasized that they appeared to be employed, well housed, and well fed.

In Britain on the other hand, unemployment remained high throughout the 1930’s, and social welfare benefits were actually being cut by the Labour (and then National) Government. It produced comments like those of Hillson who, after having seen German workers, said of Britain:

One of the most distressing aspects of the streets of our big towns is the obvious poverty of many of our fellow countrymen. One has no need to dilate on the acknowledged squalor of the slums of many industrial areas. It is not encouraging for one who has read in the morning’s newspaper that prosperity has returned to find groups of down-at-heel Welsh miners (genuine or not) shouting “All Through the Night” or the Aberystwyth tune in half a dozen main streets...It is too true that although we are undoubtedly the richest individual nation in the world, we cannot keep beggars from the public highway...One does not encounter such conditions in Germany. There is no outward poverty on the scale we know it at home...There are no slums in Germany like those which make a visit to our East End such a grim experience. There are no people in rags.²⁶³

Having seen a German soup kitchen for the poor, Christopher Sidgwick could feel no swell of British superiority. Instead he wrote, “I had no fine feelings of national pride (I only wish I could have some on this particular matter). It gives me no pleasure now to point to that misery,

²⁶³ Hillson, *I Speak of Germany*, p.164.

poverty and squalor and say: 'look what these Germans are up to, spooning out food at twopence a time,' because there are a great many people in England not getting enough food even at nothing a time."²⁶⁴

Fascist states having taken control of national projects through public works seemed proof enough that Keynesian formulas worked. But, in Britain there were pitifully few such programs. Meanwhile, said the critics, both the infrastructures and the laborers languished. In The Case for Germany, A. P. Laurie wrote of Britain's failure, "There are two ways of dealing with the unemployment problem. One, the easier, is to pay them out of taxation a dole sufficient to keep them alive. This has been our method since the War and has cost us hundreds of millions with nothing to show for it. We have occasionally undertaken public works in a sporadic and inefficient manner, resulting in wastage of public money with nothing to show for it commensurate with the expenditure."²⁶⁵ Outdated infrastructures at home seemed to cry out for attention which could also do much for Britain's unemployed in the process. While in Italy and Germany marshlands were drained and "reclaimed," in Britain, said G. Ward Price, "There are countless similar square miles of waterlogged pasture...which seem to have gone back to primitive desolation for good."²⁶⁶

While these far right authors were avid proponents of the creation of new technologies and engineering projects, they were also quite aware that the addition of new production technology could exacerbate the unemployment problem. They certainly had no problem with adding machines for improved production, but insisted upon the state's assurance that these did not make life more unbearable for laborers. As *Action* reported in one of its ubiquitous reports on

²⁶⁴ Sidgwick, German Journey, p. 96.

²⁶⁵ Laurie, The Case for Germany, p.123.

²⁶⁶ G. Ward Price, "Germany's 4,000 Labor Camps," *Daily Mail*, November 1, 1933, p. 8.

industrial strife, “In 1913 8 percent of the output of coal was cut by machinery...In 1925 the figures had increased to 20 percent...During 1934 the figures had risen to 47 percent...None of these mechanical improvements in production had any beneficial effect on the pay and conditions of the men employed; they have in fact deteriorated!” The Extreme right was generally adamant about modernizing production, but called for this modernization to contribute to the well being of the British worker.

Some new technological wonders could themselves be sites of horrible labor conditions. One example of this was the great ocean liners of the era. This was “exposed” by a BUF author named Don Beresford who told his own tale of life working on a passenger ship with the oppressed engine and service crew. The two-part series was titled, “Floating Hells: Astounding Exposure of Life Below Decks on a British Luxury Liner.” Beresford described brutal working conditions aboard ship. He was made to work eighteen hours a day, and when down below, “the atmosphere became volcanic.” He tells of being treated like a criminal by condescending officers and wealthy passengers. The stark contrasts were obvious and emphasized. First, the poor cabin crew suffered miserable conditions while providing service to the ultra-rich on the most luxurious crafts in the world. The second contrast was the comparison with German shipping lines. A caption under the photo to the piece read, “Under National Socialism German ship-board crews, bell-boys etc. always get a square deal.” What a difference this was next to the “workers” liners described by British visitors to Germany who had been so impressed with the “Strength through Joy” program. In that Nazi program, workers built their own passenger liners, which were then used to take them on holiday cruises. On British liners, ship-workers toiled in semi-slavery, while the fortunate few above treated them like dirt. These were the conditions, said the far right, to be expected under free market democracy. Meanwhile, said

Beresford “under no Dictator were people given such a raw deal as we were getting. We compared the merits of German and Italian vessels, and agreed that where the welfare of their crews were concerned, our ships were far behind any of these.”²⁶⁷

Shipping

Whatever the conditions for crew members, as early as the mid 1920's, pro-fascist publications began to show great concern about Britain's declining position in shipping and ship construction. Having long been the world's preeminent producer of great cargo, passenger and military ships, Britons took justifiable pride in their leadership. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, as other nations began to encroach upon this position, Britain's far right raised the alarm. While they expressed their admiration for the rise of Italian and German production, they also wrote with increasing urgency, pleading for the government to intervene.

The British Fascists' *Fascist Bulletin* began running regular columns on the shipping industry beginning in the late twenties. These articles always included positive comments about the quality of British technical skill, but also pointed out the danger signs from foreign competition and over-capacity. Reflecting the British Fascists' conservatism, these articles said much more about the decline of British shipping, than about any viable solutions through state aid. In April of 1926, the articles began, warning:

The productive capacity of the British shipbuilding industry is today far in excess of the requirements of British shipping. Before the war we built, not only for our own merchant fleet, but also for the owners of half the other nations of the world. During the war the demand for tonnage increased enormously, and so, of course, did the capacity of the yards. Today we have no war demand and we have lost many of our foreign markets. Italy, Holland, Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries, which prior to 1914 came to the Clyde, the Tyne or Belfast for a great deal of their tonnage, are building

²⁶⁷ Don Beresford, “Floating Hells,” *Action*, May 1, 1937, p. 9.

nearly all the vessels they want in their own yards, and several of them are even building ships for us!²⁶⁸

The *Saturday Review* expressed much the same concern for the struggling industry, but went further in its worries about the reasons. Economics and foreign competition were still great problems, but in an article titled “The Shipbuilding Slump,” the Editors also pointed to Britain’s failure to stay at the cutting edge of technology. “Another fact revealed by the returns,” they said, “is that we no longer seem to be the pioneers of the industry...if that means our Merchant Marine is ceasing to be not merely the largest, but the youngest and most up-to-date on the seas, it is more serious than we thought.”²⁶⁹

By 1933, the hard right wing press was taking on a more urgent tone, bordering on panic. With the advances of Italian shipping, and the new state initiatives going on in Nazi Germany, British far right critics wondered why their Government had not kept up with the times. In the *Daily Mail*, Sir Abe Bailey wrote regularly about Britain’s shipping woes and launched the campaign with an article under the headline, “Save Our Ships!” While it outraged him that Italian ships could run freely within the trade routes of the British Empire, he had no criticism for Italy. Why *wouldn’t* they take advantage of the opportunities? His criticism was instead leveled at the negligence of the National Government which in its attachment to free and open trade, were ignoring the situation. He strained to point out that state-subsidized shipping, like Fascist Italy’s, had an instant ability to outcompete British cargo ships, which operated with no assistance.

Another Italian ship not long ago completed a round voyage entirely within the British Empire. Her tour of 13,000 miles earned her a gratuity of more than 1,100 pounds from the Italian Government, and this enabled her to undercut British ships at every British

²⁶⁸ “The Shipping Industry,” *Fascist Bulletin*, April 3, 1926, p. 5.

²⁶⁹ “The Shipping Slump,” *Saturday Review*, January 6, 1926, p. 49.

port she touched...The sugar growers of Mauritius are given a preference of some 4 pounds per ton in the United Kingdom market. But their sugar is being increasingly brought here by subsidized Italian ships.²⁷⁰

Foreign competitors' had the advantage of state assistance, especially in Italy, where the Fascist Government made it a national priority. As to whether these ships would run profitably in the short run: "Nobody seems to care whether they do or not. These are not ships in the ordinary sense. They are strokes of State policy. They are items in the Mussolini programme for putting Italy on the map." And as for the British state in this new arena: "All the leading countries in the world have taken a hand in the mad game – all except Great Britain. For the past seven years, since the death of the Trade Facilities Act, no governmental aid of any kind has been extended to British shipbuilding." Unless aided by technical advances, of which Italy seemed to be taking the lead anyway, or unless the state intervened, "Along present lines, there is nothing ahead of British shipping but a continuous and cumulative process of attrition and decline."²⁷¹

Motoring and the Roads

The increasing presence of the automobile and its associated infrastructures raised another issue at which the extreme right could vent its frustration at the Government and democracy in general. Conditions for motorists, they said, were poor in Britain, where motor taxes were unreasonable and often squandered by the government. They complained that the roads were unsafe, due to poor planning, uncoordinated design, and poorly configured signage. Finally, Britain's government was producing a national highway system that was being built in fits and starts, which resulted in completely irrational routes and fragmented ownership and maintenance. All in all, wrote far right commentators, Britain's politicians were completely clueless about the

²⁷⁰ Sir Abe Bailey, "Save Our Ships!" *Daily Mail*, October 11, 1933, p.12.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

new technology, and worked within a system that assured no unified, rational plan could ever be produced.

In the matter of taxation, those who wrote on such matters, such as Sir Malcolm Campbell, were convinced that Britain was taxing motorists far too steeply. At the time, Britain levied charges on individual cars, based on the level of horsepower. It also taxed gasoline. Campbell wondered if Britain's motorists, hit from both sides, would be discouraged from buying new vehicles, and if this taxation would encourage technical development in the wrong areas. In his regular column in Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, he used very combative language, reflecting his frustration with the government. Some examples of his articles included "A New Plan to Squeeze the Motorist- He Must Fight for Fair Play!" and "Motorists Pay Enough!" He consistently made the point that motorists were no longer a small, wealthy minority, but a growing number of ordinary citizens. For the automobile to continue to widen its appeal to all branches of the community, taxation would have to be brought into line to make motoring accessible to all. When, in 1933, new taxes were proposed in Parliament Campbell fired off, "It is far too much the fashion nowadays to regard the motorist as a person of unlimited financial resources...my submission was and still is that the motorist already pays enough for his use of the roads. With his car tax, petrol tax , and compulsory insurance, he is already taxed far and away beyond any other part of the community, and in not a few cases almost beyond his capacity to pay."²⁷²

The BUF writers were also vocal critics of Britain's motor taxation system. A. Raven Thomson, among the group of the BUF's avid motorists in its Auto Club, was incensed that motorists should bear the full burden for a national benefit like roads. Like Campbell, he saw

²⁷² Sir Malcolm Campbell, "Motorists Pay Enough!" *Daily Mail*, July 14, 1933, p.4.

heavy taxation bearing down on the motorist of modest means. In his policy pamphlet, *Motorways for Britain: a Constructive Solution to the Traffic Problem*, he wrote

It is only just that the road user should pay for the roads, but it is not just that the unfortunate motorists should be taxed like the veritable milkcow of democracy, and that only a small fraction of the money extorted from him should be spent on the roads. This is an infamous imposition upon the long-suffering motoring fraternity. No doubt at one time the motor-car was regarded as a luxury, which should be taxed for general purposes; but today it has long passed out of the luxury class, and the above taxes fall with stunning force upon the poor man's car, which although second-hand, pays the same tax and uses more petrol than the new car.²⁷³

Anne Brock Griggs was another BUF writer who accused the government of extortion, and further, of squandering the motor taxes. She also related this supposed misuse of funds to the road safety issue, arguing that road taxes should logically be used to make them less dangerous. She wrote an article for *Action* under the headline, "Crippled Lives, A Life an Hour is Lost on the Roads of Britain: Anne Brock Griggs Asks Where Does the Money Go?" In the article she writes that the British "public awake to the fact that they are not getting value for the money taken from them in taxes. Worse still the real wealth of the nation is squandered daily. Lives are lost, broken or crippled in the daily toll upon the roads."²⁷⁴ She accused the government of neglecting the safety of the nation in favor of diverting money away from the obvious need for improvements like non-skid surfacing.

A correspondent writes, 'I do not think there are any people more heavily taxed than the British people... Where does the road fund go to? And have the main roads got non-skid surfaces? No! Only in patches. Where does the money go to?'... The whole of the annual petrol tax, 7,000,000 pounds, is ear marked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for other purposes. Not content with that the businesslike Neville takes 500,000 pounds from the motor tax itself... In spite of more than 30,000 pounds spent by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research we have not got rid of the poor surfaces, bad lighting, and blind corners and other causes of accidents...

²⁷³ A. Raven Thomson, "Motorways for Britain: A Constructive Solution to the Traffic Problem," (London: BUF Press, 1934?), p. 6.

²⁷⁴ Anne Brock Griggs, "Crippled Lives," *Action*, March 26, 1936, p. 4.

Finally, as was so common in the BUF press by this time, she turned her attack on the Jewish Minister of Transport, Leslie Hore-Belisha, rejecting his strategies for safety improvement. Speed reduction was not the answer, she said, making the oft cited connection between speed and modern progress: “the results of radio appeals, beacons and speed limits have shown, says Hore-Belisha, ‘conclusive proof of the mercy of controlling speed.’ When the speed of cars is that of the tortoise, death and accidents will be nil. *What of Progress?* According to our Jewish Minister it is more merciful to substitute disablement for death, even though that disablement may be for life.”²⁷⁵

Campbell addressed the wider relationship of rational highway design to safety in his book The Roads and the Problem of their Safety, published in 1937. He began the book with rather restrained and dignified language as was his usual approach. But, as the book progressed, he moved to increasingly strong language and implications that the British government was accountable for the lives lost on the roads. He was quick to defend Britain’s motorists from the generalizations that they were irresponsible or reckless, instead assigning blame to the design of the roads. Accidents, he said, were “not to be laid wholly, or even in greater part, at the door of the traffic whether motor or otherwise. No less an authority than the County Surveyor of Oxfordshire, Mr. G.T. Bennett, has recently delivered himself of the astonishing statement that four out of five of the fatal road accidents which occur in the county would not happen were the roads designed and constructed on the ideal lines recommended by the Ministry of Transport.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.4.

²⁷⁶ Sir Malcolm Campbell, The Problem of the Roads and their Safety (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1937), p.116.

He goes on to accuse the Minister of Transport of ignoring resources to help the situation. The Advertising Association, he wrote, had created great successes in helping the Post Office to increase its business, and so offered its assistance to the Ministry to help reduce traffic accidents. Campbell exclaimed, “The offer was declined!... The Post Office advertises as a trading concern, whose principal objects are to render public service and to make a profit from so doing. The Ministry of Transport is only concerned with the lives and safety of the users of the roads – and there are no profits in that!”²⁷⁷ Though he does not name Hore-Belisha, his allusions to a (Jewish) Minister of Transport, supposedly sacrificing British lives and limbs for more profitable projects were obvious.

Both taxation and safety were bound up tightly with the larger issue of what shape Britain’s road systems would take as the nation moved into the future. This question was widely discussed and figured prominently in BUF policy materials. It also provided a regularly used platform for attacking Britain’s politicians and denigrating the liberal democratic system. True enough, Britain’s road building proceeded unevenly through the early years of motoring. Local municipalities owned the land and maintained the rights to construction and design features. They were also charged with road maintenance. The result was an ad hoc effort in road building with single routes from one locale to the other, without a carefully planned network of linked highways. These fragmented sections were known as “ribbon roads,” the system as “ribbon building,” and it came under constant criticism from the far right. The project, they insisted, needed to be conceived in national terms and executed by a national institution. Germany’s splendid progress with its autobahn presented a glaring example that pro-fascists never hesitated to reference. In *Motorways for Britain*, Thomson wrote at length on the subject:

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p.193.

We have had quite enough of the grotesque attempts of muddling politicians to squeeze modern traffic into the straight waistcoat of an obsolete medieval road system. No longer shall that triumph of British technical skill, the modern car, be compelled to crawl along the dangerous roads, or be forced abroad to prove its merit on the “Autostrada” and “Autobahnen” of foreign countries without a fraction of our resources...A planned system of national highways must transcend local interests of all kinds, which have under democratic “freedom” unending powers of obstruction, not to speak of the immense expense of “compensation” of private rights. One can safely predict that democracy in a highly populated country will never succeed in planning and constructing a national system of roadways, except at appalling cost and infinite delay. An authoritarian government can act at once, override all obstruction to the national will and compensate only for real loss, which is not offset by the convenience of the location of the new road. It can also prevent the accumulation of speculative parasites about the new road, such as have disgraced by “ribbon” building” building our own inadequate “bypasses,” and reserve for itself any advance land values which the new road may create.²⁷⁸

The attacks on “out of date” and/or Jewish politicians, like Hore-Belisha, could also include attacks on their manhood. This again suggests a discursive link between new technology and ultra-masculinity. Comments in *Action* said “In Britain, under Financial-Democracy, we have a little Jewish matriarch with attendant camera men holding up a restrictive hand to slow down traffic and throttle the nation’s motor trade in the interest of pedestrians who have not been saved because the roads are obsolete. The solution was plain six years ago when Herbert Morrison obstructed it in a Labour Government, and it is plain today when Hore-Belisha obstructs it in a Conservative Government.” To make Britain’s problems even more glaring, above the article was a photo of Luigi Fagioli streaking to victory at the Italian Grand Prix, driving a German Mercedes Benz. The caption underneath read, “Our heavy motor taxation and inadequate roads prevent Britain building cars to compete with these large and fast German and Italian machines.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Thomson, Motorways for Britain, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ Lynx, “Inadequate Roads,” *Action* June 18, 1936, p. 9.

But, individual politicians could do little while working inside a system like liberal democracy which, according to fascists and pro-fascists, was a slave to finance capital. Thomson never hesitated to make this point, especially when speaking about national infrastructures or matters of technical progress. In *Motorways for Britain* he wrote that “when discussing the traffic problem, almost the last thing the professional politician considers are the roads along which this traffic flows. It is almost as if the last thing a plumber were to discuss in a faulty water system were the pipes themselves...The reason, of course, is that new roads cost money, and in a finance-ridden system money for anything but speculation in the commodity is always short.”²⁸⁰ Corruption by finance was one problem with the democratic system, but the far right saw others as well, such as factionalism. Liberal democracy seemed to ensure that vested interests and political parties would always block *national* progress in fighting for their own narrow agendas. These contests, they said, inevitably created stalemate and could produce only fragmented and inferior projects. Campbell, though not publicly calling for a fascist Britain, was exasperated with democratic factions which, he felt, stymied modern progress. He wrote that “Every authority sincerely believes that none but itself is competent to properly carry out the functions of local administration and is understandably jealous of its ancient privileges. That the majority of them would fight strenuously against any attempt by Parliament to deprive them of those rights is a matter of certainty. It is the Englishman’s almost slavish devotion to ancient precedents which is one of the most formidable obstacles to all progress, not only in relation to the highways, but in all that relates to the process of government.”²⁸¹ Campbell and other far right writers were campaigning for Britain to create a system of highways on the German model,

²⁸⁰ Thomson, *Motorways for Britain*, pp. 1-2.

²⁸¹ Campbell, *The Problem of the Roads and their Safety*, p.107.

which would “*connect* the major centers of industry, not *avoid* them.” These major arteries would then be crossed by overhead bridges, be off-limits to bicycles and pedestrians, and eventually feed into perimeter highways in the major cities. It was the basic logic that underlies most highway construction today. Despite all his frustrations, Campbell could still see the future: “I can visualize one of these roads, straight, well graded, and scientifically engineered, with its dual carriageways centrally illuminated by overhead sodium vapour lamps, stretching into the far distance as an avenue of golden light in which there is perfect visibility, and therefore as safe to drive upon by night as by day.”²⁸² But, Campbell was convinced the British political leopard would have to change its spots to allow such futurist visions to become a reality.

In 1936, the British Government undertook the nationalization of its highway system, which immediately undermined the vitriolic attacks of the BUF and other extreme right campaigners. But, as they had done with the Ottawa Accords which undermined their campaign for protection, the BUF press continued to attack, calling the move too little and too late. They instead continued to hammer away at their central message that Britain was forever “lagging behind,” because democracy made it impossible to do otherwise. Thomson wrote an article about nationalization under the headline, “Nationalizing the Roads, Six Years too Late.” In it he said,

We are gratified that democratic government is at last acting upon our suggestions of 1930, but what is the use of legislating to meet the traffic problem of 1930 in 1936? How hopelessly democracy lags behind every problem it has to solve! Mosley has long since advanced beyond his road programme for 1930 to meet the needs of increasing traffic... Today we should be satisfied with nothing less than a completely new system of national highways, quite distinct from the medieval cum Roman roads which the Government desires to adapt to modern needs... Nationalization of existing roads may be a step, but it is completely outdated.²⁸³

²⁸² Ibid., p. 111.

²⁸³ A. Raven Thomson, “Nationalizing the Roads, Six Years too Late,” *Action*, July 16, 1936, p.7.

Within the body of the article the editors included a photograph of a long motor road that ended abruptly in the countryside. Again one can recognize the visual power of technology and engineering in creating political metaphor. The caption under the photo read: “UNDER DEMOCRACY: ‘The Road that Leads Nowhere.’”²⁸⁴

Democracy in the Air

Britain’s future in the air was the leading issue within the extreme right political program during the interwar years. “Air politics,” permeated nearly every wider debate including foreign policy, internal improvements, preserving the Empire, national defense, and even the slumping economy. The most hotly debated of these issues involved the place of the airplane in defense and that subject will be thoroughly addressed in the following chapter. But, Civil aviation also provided a platform for far right commentators to express their disgust with British politicians and the parliamentary system in general. That debate also exposed some inconsistencies in their rationale.

First, there was no question in extreme right discourse about Britain’s position in the air. Britain, despite its early leadership and pioneering achievements with America, had fallen to second rate status. While praising British designers, engineers, and courageous flyers, they leveled their criticism at the democratic government for squandering Britain’s lead. Public spectacles, like the state sponsored Italian Air Armada, showed Britain’s supposedly diminishing position in sharp relief. The *Saturday Review*’s book review of Marshall Balbo’s personal account, *My Air Armada*, made this quite clear.

Air Marshall Italo Balbo’s “My Air Armada” (Hurst & Blackett, 18s.) is at once a glorification of Italian aviation and, by implication, a criticism of British aviation; for it records the rather humiliating fact that the first squadron of aircraft to fly in mass formation between the United Kingdom and the Dominion of Canada, to fly in other

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p.7.

words on what must eventually become one of our Empire air lines, was not a British but an Italian squadron. In another age it would have seemed impossible that this tremendous pioneer feat on a route geographically marked out for British aircraft and British pilots, should have been undertaken by any country but our own... “My Air Armada” is a high speed, hugely entertaining description of a great achievement. And the only regret it leaves with the English reader is that the squadron was not composed of the aircraft of the British Royal Air Force.²⁸⁵

Lord Halsbury authored a series of analytical articles run in the *Saturday Review* which examined the question of Britain’s loss of air leadership. Part One of this series was entitled, “England in the Air: And Some Causes of Failure,” and pointed the finger directly at the government. He said that no one who had “studied the progress of international civil aviation could deny for a moment that our pilots, our machines, and our engines are second to none. At first sight everything seems most favorable for our becoming the premier flying nation in the world. Why then, have we fallen behind? The chief cause of our difficulties has been a mistaken policy.”²⁸⁶ Furthermore, that broken policy was being cobbled together by politicians who had no business legislating air issues. The parliamentary system, claimed C. G. Grey, produced professional politicians who knew nothing about the technical aspects of aircraft or its development. And they were as un-interested as they were ignorant, according to him. During the debate on the air budget, during 1933, Grey was outraged that “there were only 30 members present out of the full 615,” and that “the great majority of members are so little interested in air affairs that they cannot be bothered even to listen to the debate.”²⁸⁷ This was a serious problem he said, as by 1936 air politics had come to “hold the whip hand over all other politics.”²⁸⁸ The

²⁸⁵ “Air Pioneers,” *Saturday Review*, June 16, 1934, p. 704.

²⁸⁶ Lord Halsbury, “England in the Air,” *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1933, p.119.

²⁸⁷ Grey, “On the Air Estimates,” *The Aeroplane*, March 15, 1933, p. 437.

²⁸⁸ Grey, “On Politics and the Air War,” *The Aeroplane*, March 18, 1936, p. 343.

net product of unqualified leaders, an out-of-date political system, and an indifferent policy, said Grey and other far right observers, was a civil aviation industry restrained from fulfilling its promising potential. Government regulation was part of the problem.

An overriding feature of the authoritarian governments British pro-fascists regarded so highly was the state's willingness to intervene in social and economic life. By creating structures for things like youth programs, health care, and social work, the state was sacrificing individual freedoms supposedly for the collective good. Likewise in industry, the state directed private industry and prohibited the abuses produced by unchecked finance capital. So, regulation and/or state support of industries like shipping, auto manufacturing, and the "magnificent" highway projects was a feature of dictatorships most admired by British pro-fascists. Britain's government, quite similarly, had created a regulated, protected state monopoly for the national passenger/cargo airline, Imperial Airways. It would seem that this would have been embraced by the far right as a step in the right direction for Britain's air policy. But, instead this policy came in for acrimonious criticism.

In one of the earliest editions of the BUF's weekly newspaper, *The Blackshirt*, (which would eventually become *Action*) a special edition was run on Britain's air policy. Two stories dominated the coverage, one on air defense, and the other on civil aviation. The latter ran under the headline, "Freedom of the Air Essential!" The piece announced the BUF's stance on an open air policy, its link to modernity, and the ever present connections to national security. Also, as in other far right discourse, there is the language of fear; fear that Britain had been surpassed and was falling further behind the rest of the world:

World Air Routes are in the making and must be the first consideration of the modern State and modern Empire. If the present senseless obstructions to air transport – the almost hopeless tangle of motives, jealousies and military fears – are not removed, the issue will ultimately lead to war...Britain both in military and civil aviation ranks below

many of the powers who are without a fraction of the possibilities for air development that concern the British Empire.²⁸⁹

To understand the anger of the extreme right over government regulation, which they so often embraced in other areas, it is necessary to understand the regulatory environment of the time. The situation for European air route control was regulated, during this period, by the international agreement secured through the International Commission on Air Navigation (ICAN). This had been established during the Paris Air Convention of 1919, an off-shoot of the great Peace Conference. Its objective was to create conditions for safe travel and the rules and regulations of route control. It was this governing body more than anything else that infuriated Britain's extreme right. The establishment of the commission in Paris and the high visibility of French officials grated on ultra-nationalistic Britons, who were outraged that the French would have any degree of control over Britain's air development. This was quite similar to the far right campaign against collective security (and disarmament) within the League of Nations. Perhaps government control over aviation would have been palatable to them if it had not been subject to foreign or collective regulation. As it was, civil aviation appeared to be one more example of the Government frittering away Britain's national self-determination.

Not only was Britain's civil aviation development seen to be subject to a collection of foreigners, but those foreigners were mostly French. While distrust of the French was not universal amongst the extreme right, it was quite prevalent. The French intransigence concerning treatment of Germany after the Treaty of Paris certainly helped create anti-French feeling. But, the most frightening features of French politics, to the far right in Britain, were the accession of the Popular Front Government in 1936 and the Franco-Soviet pact. As Griffiths writes, "to a large section of the community which had a fear and hatred of Bolshevism, this

²⁸⁹ John A. Lincoln, "Freedom of the Air Essential," *Action*, June 24, 1933, p. 1.

raised the specter of Britain going to war on behalf of Russia.”²⁹⁰ C. G. Grey was perhaps the most vehement in his derision for Britain’s air policy and its commitment to ICAN. His comments reveal both his disgust with the Government and his paranoia about French encroachment: “The idea of putting civil aviation under international control is a purely French scheme...the motive behind it seems to be French terror of air attack by her neighbors, and secondly the quite sound commercial idea of getting a stranglehold on international air transport.”²⁹¹ Those to the furthest right, like the BUF, said Britain should ignore international treaties (as Germany had done), and stake her own claim. Such an intensely regulated environment was stifling technical development, said John Lincoln, which had to advance before international agreements would ever be needed. If international issues complicated matters, Britain’s military air power would be a far better safeguard than collectivism.

It is obvious that with our Empire air routes only partially developed and by no means secure, we cannot allow their development to be a matter of international mismanagement. It is also obvious that civil air transport must be developed before it can be controlled. Internationally controlled air routes are the ultimate goal of Aviation, but to hand over such air routes and development as have been wrested from an unkind world to the tender mercies of international control would lead to world disaster...the best service we can do to both the world and ourselves is to take our rightful place in aviation...our military aircraft will provide the best assurance against attack and the misuse of civil air transport...Fascism is concerned only that Britain shall be first in the air.²⁹²

In addition to their failure to support British air power in the international community, far right air enthusiasts saw their government also bungling air development at home. Grey, for instance, said the bureaucracy at the Air Ministry was failing in its obligations to create sound airports and provide technical leadership to private engineers. He rolled his eyes at their

²⁹⁰ Griffiths, Fellow Travelers of the Right, p. 203.

²⁹¹ Grey, “On the Internationalization of Civil Aviation,” *The Aeroplane*, April 19, 1933, p. 665.

²⁹² Lincoln, “Freedom of the Air Essential,” *The Blackshirt*, June 24, 1933, p. 1.

tiresome lectures that brought nothing new to the conversation. Rather, he said, Air Ministry bureaucrats often imposed rules that prohibited private development, though he was never specific about exactly what actions he meant. The blame for Britain's retarded progress, he railed, lay with "the half-baked technocracy which has been placed in authority over us at Farnborough and Kingsway...who have no fear of weapons of war, but are scared to death of a slide-rule or the jawbone of a political ass."²⁹³ These under-trained government drones, he said, "trample about interfering with design, interfering with experiments, and interfering with the freedom of aviation generally."²⁹⁴ Farnborough and Kingsway (important national air fields and research centers) were bad enough. But, Croyden Aerodrome was an even more disgraceful mess. In *Action*, Geoffrey Dorman, again under the pen-name "Blackbird," wrote a regular column that often bemoaned the condition of the nation's air facilities. He went as far as to call Croyden the "world's worst airport." Immediately after the First World War, the newly created Air Ministry moved its main facilities from Hounslow to Croyden air field. There were only two landing strips and some make-shift hangars and sheds, but the government planned its expansion. According to Dorman, however, this modernization had never really taken place. In his article "Croyden's 100 Year Plan," he attacked the Government's lack of action over the preceding two decades, and linked it directly to the inadequacies of liberal democracy.

Under National Socialism in Germany the State has produced some of the finest aerodromes in the world. That at Frankfurt was cut out of a forest and leveled in something under three years. If the Government had chosen to set about Croyden aerodrome with a proper plan, they could have made the finest aerodrome in the country; but England is a democratic country. They have been talking about improving Croyden aerodrome for seventeen years, but they have got no further than to talk; and now I am afraid they will never get any further...one sincerely hopes that our short sighted

²⁹³ Grey, "On the Freedom of Civil Aviation," *The Aeroplane*, January 18, 1933, p. 85.

²⁹⁴ Grey, "On Witch-Doctors and Medicine Men," *The Aeroplane*, January 10, 1934, p.45.

politicians will not dispose of it as building land, as it is a vital factor in the defense of London situation, as well as for communications.²⁹⁵

The air safety record was another recurring theme, and was used often in attacking the existing Government. To shake the British public away from its democratic foundations was a monumental task for fascists and pro-fascists. For this reason, the fascist press was routinely apocalyptic and sensationalist. Mobilizing air tragedy, therefore, was part of the standard method of sensationalism— laying lost human lives at the door of the politicians. Croyden’s layout was seen as a terrible hazard. Dorman wrote that “So unlevel is the aerodrome that the biggest air liners disappear from the view,” and that it was “extremely dangerous for blind (night) landings on account of the inequalities in the surface.”²⁹⁶ He was further angered by the rash of crashes occurring with small private manufacturers’ models. In 1936 he wrote a column discussing the latest crash of the small and obscure model, the “flying flea,” and in it explained his view of faulty policy. It was ridiculous, he said, to charge enormous fees to established and reputable firms for certificates of “airworthiness” for their new models. DeHavilland, Percival, and Phillips-Powis were all charged exorbitant fees by the Ministry, which upped the cost of their aircraft and undermined them in the market. Meanwhile, he said, private individuals could produce and fly aircraft with no such oversight. In fact, wrote Dorman, the policy should be reversed. Large firms were induced toward safety through the market, while possessing the resources and expertise to make their planes as safe as possible. An individual, on the other hand, “can build what he likes and fly what he likes. So far he has only killed himself, but he may well crash in a densely populated area and kill a number of people... Surely common sense

²⁹⁵ Geoffrey Dorman, “Croyden’s 100 Year Plan” *Action*, March 27, 1937, p.10.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10.

dictates a reversal of the present policy.”²⁹⁷ The life of the Flea pilot had been lost and surely the Air Ministry bore some of the blame. But, Dorman worried more about future loss of life with the current inept bureaucracy.

It is the clear duty of the Air Ministry, in the interest of human life, to put a Flea through wind-tunnel tests and clear up certain outstanding doubts. Up to the moment of going to press the Ministry have refused to do this. They will be compelled to do so in the long run, and by doing so at once they may save many lives. If they persist in their refusal, the deaths of any people killed in fleas in the future must lie at their door, through their neglect to do their job. It is the plain duty of the Air Minister, Lord Swinton, to order research work on the Flea to be done at once.²⁹⁸

The improved safety at airports and the air-worthiness policies for individually manufactured aircraft seemed to Dorman like straight-forward logic; “common sense,” as he put it. But, he said, “we shall not have common sense until we get a dictator.”²⁹⁹

Democracy on the Air

Radio broadcasting in Britain provided another target for criticism from the extreme right. Like civil aviation, wireless communications had been early on regulated by the British government and made into a monopoly which evolved into the British Broadcasting Corporation. During the interwar years, the BBC came in for routine attacks. This was chiefly for its programming content, which the far right found abysmal. These attacks on content were related to the attitude that radio represented a splendid opportunity that was being squandered by finance-dominated liberal democracy. Also, some on the extreme right saw the BBC’s monopoly position as squashing new avenues of technical advance.

²⁹⁷ Geoffrey Dorman, “The Flying Flea—The Air Ministry’s Duty” *Action*, July 4, 1936, p. 11.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

British fascists and pro-fascists during the 1930's seemed to understand well the practical value of radio for propaganda. Seeing how wireless was put to use by the dictators, they were furious at the BBC's decision to prohibit radio addresses from radical political points of view. Their inability to access the radio waves, they knew, was one key to their limited success. One author in *Action*, for instance, reported that "I tuned in to the Rome broadcasting station for the English bulletin, which is now given on Sundays. I was amazed and pleased to hear an accurate description of the meeting (BUF rally at Victoria Park) given, and also a number of extracts from Sir Oswald's great speech." Meanwhile, on the BBC, "not a word was heard of this great gathering of Britishers, but I feel sure that we were told all about what was happening in (Socialist) France and (Jewish) Palestine."³⁰⁰ Peter Eckersley wrote of the BBC failing in its responsibility to allow all points of view on the air in a true forum of political exchange. In a turbulent and confusing political environment, he asked,

...what was broadcasting doing? Nothing except refusing its microphone right and left, realizing there was a lot to be said on both sides and so letting neither side say anything...Mr. Bernard Shaw used a BBC microphone, a BBC studio and a British intercontinental wireless link to give a broadcast talk to America on his views about Russia. Not a syllable of what he said was allowed to escape into our free and democratic air. Sir Oswald Mosley and Mr. Harry Pollitt represent minorities but they have never been allowed to broadcast their own views. In true democratic theory the views of a minority are valuable, even those which say that democracy is out of date. Mr. Churchill was forbidden to speak on the Indian question...to cut us off from contact with well-trusted statesmen like Mr. Churchill is, whatever the circumstances, ridiculous.³⁰¹

As part of their attack on the BBC, the far right called for opening up radio to competition. We can see how state intervention was not appreciated by the extreme right— when that state was democratic. But, the BUF could only lament when the BBC announced its expansion of its headquarters, Broadcasting House, in 1936. They were quick to bring Jew-baiting into the attack

³⁰⁰ Bluebird, "Radio Flashes," *Action*, June 4, 1936, p.6.

³⁰¹ Eckersley, *The Power Behind the Microphone*, p. 159.

by this date, which reflected the BUF's shift to an aggressive anti-Semitism. "Bluebird" wrote: "So they are going to make Broadcasting House twice its present size. Soon it will be able to hold twice its present quantity of red tape, and there will be twice the number of newsfinches, twice the size of the present ones, which will be twice as poisonous... There are to be studios about twice the size of the Jewish picture palace... And, of course, a Synagogue."³⁰²

Eckersley's book The Power Behind the Microphone, was the most lengthy diatribe against the BBC. In it, he attacked the BBC's organizational culture, its programming and the immovable obstacle it presented against new technologies. In terms of entertainment content, Eckersley lamented the BBC's moribund programming and could not help connecting the problem to democracy.

It is such a feeble thing compared with what it might be. It is a great bore, dull and hackneyed and pompously self-conscious. Its effect is more a drug than a stimulant. Choppy programs break off a concert to tell us, on all wavelengths, the price of a fat cow; a prayer ends to give at dictation speed, some news for little ships. Self satisfaction oozes between salacious jokes, hardly tolerable in a music hall, while views are given in prosy essays read in the high pitched whine of emasculated liberalism.³⁰³

Liberal democracy, as those on the far right were fond of saying, produced professional politicians, not competent professionals trained in specific technical skills. Being a government department, the BBC continued the democratic pattern of placing innocuous drones in its staff, rather than those qualified to create radio programming that Britons would actually enjoy. He suggested instead "men whose background was in the arts instead of 'public service,' however worthy. This would ensure the appointment of an executive staff likely to have originality and enthusiasm rather than an ability to 'fit in' to a large organization."³⁰⁴

³⁰² Bluebird, "Radio Flashes" Action, June 4, 1936, p. 6.

³⁰³ Eckersley, The Power Behind the Microphone, p. 14.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

Eckersley went on to recommend the break-up of the BBC into regional centers, and a rather elaborate plan for wired broadcasting with a great number of channel choices. Although that vision never came to fruition within the technology of radio, it did appear eventually in the realm of television. Today's cable television systems operate essentially along the lines Eckersley proposed. His bitterness against the BBC had some validity, but, of course, we must remember that Eckersley had been fired as the BBC's Chief Engineer. Although his termination was purportedly for reasons of his divorce, Eckersley believed that was a pretense for the real reason – he was a modern-minded maverick. His modernism was certainly evident in his engineering talents and his technical vision. But, Eckersley also showed a modern tendency in his distaste for the Oxbridge crowd and traditional codes of “clubby” behavior. A man of humble origins, himself, he wrote scathingly about the corporate culture of the BBC in explaining its lack of vision, initiative, and quality.

The founder of the BBC (Sir John Reith) was basically an organizer and a disciplinarian. This was excellent at first, but not so valuable when the Corporation was established. It was asked of every applicant for a responsible job in the BBC: ‘Is he a gentleman?’ To yield to the temptation to reply ‘So much so that he does not worry if others are,’ would have been unfair to the spirit of the inquiry... The term ‘gentleman’ was not meant to describe an easy-going member of the landed aristocracy, but rather someone apt to obey blindly and put behaviourism before intelligence. In these circumstances, it was inevitable that broadcasting should have reinforced conformity... The BBC, examined in the light of what I think is an ideal, fails completely. It was well established but it has never used the power it so efficiently secured for cultural ends. On the contrary it is neither impartial in its attitude to controversy nor an upholder of good taste and original behavior.³⁰⁵

Rothermere and the Channel Tunnel

One of the particularly interesting engineering projects debated during this period was the construction of a tunnel underneath the English Channel that would connect France and Great

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.173.

Britain. It had been appraised in decades past, including the Great War years, but had always been rejected as too risky in terms of engineering and national defense. In 1930 a new proposal was put together and submitted to the government for approval. The tunnel would be for rail transport and motorcars could be transported via the trains. This, some envisioned, would provide enormous stimulus to the trade between the nations. Lord Rothermere was an avid proponent of the project and used his *Daily Mail* to promote it. Then, when the project fell through, he used his press to berate the government for its shortsightedness and its anti-modern timidity.

Rothermere published his book *My Fight to Rearm Britain* in 1939, as war was beginning. Its central message was that he had led the fight for British modernization and rearmament in view of the threats from the Continent. This is a matter of controversy as Rothermere's press was a consistent supporter of the dictatorships. That issue will be investigated more carefully in the following chapter. But, part of that campaign, said Rothermere, was the construction of the Channel Tunnel, though defense reasons were at the time less important than the commercial. He said in 1939 that "the arguments I advanced (in 1930) were economic rather than strategical, but they are still of interest..."³⁰⁶ Rothermere reprinted his long editorials from the *Daily Mail* in his book as he remembered his effort to champion the great Channel Tunnel. Those editorials from 1930 expressed his sense of urgency for the project to go forward and his exasperation with its supposedly luddite detractors. In the first piece he wrote that "Cranks have always been a special product of this country. They have opposed every improvement in Britain since the Stone Age. Some of them are making a last effort to delay the creation of that long-needed national asset the Channel Tunnel. They have deprived the nation of its advantages for over fifty

³⁰⁶ Lord Rothermere, *My Fight to Rearm Britain* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1939), p. 68.

years...*The Channel Tunnel will do more for British prosperity than any other work of engineering that could be undertaken. It has greater economic value than all the road schemes put together.*”³⁰⁷ That economic value was far-reaching, according to Rothermere. It would include first of all a reduction in shipping costs for trade to the continent. Secondly, he thought, it would boost the tourist trade immeasurably. He felt that if the tunnel were made a reality “A tour in Britain will be the goal of every Continental motorist, and of all the Americans who bring their cars to Europe in the summer. Special automobile trucks will be waiting at Calais to be attached to trains going through the Tunnel...in the height of the summer we could expect a thousand cars a day to enter this country, 95 percent of which would otherwise never have come here at all.”³⁰⁸ It followed for him, then, that the hotel industry would boom and that tourist centers would reach a “new level of prosperity.” Beyond this, the construction of the tunnel would have provided badly needed employment in the actual building process, but also in the production of the massive amount of raw materials like iron, steel, and cement. It would pay for itself by direct receipts from users in less than ten years; but, of course, the benefits to the nation would be too great to even quantify. He ended this article with a plea for the parliament to get past its own inertia, saying “Our country has got to move with the times, which are developing closer and quicker communications everywhere. That is why I say *Hurrah for the Channel Tunnel! We want to see it working in 1935!*”³⁰⁹

Later on he addressed the arguments against the tunnel. In terms of National Defense, he laughed at the fears that a continental army could use it to enter Britain. It was preposterous, he

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 68. (italics his)

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p.72. (italics his)

said, “in view of the many modern devices that could be used to close the Tunnel instantly against all transit.” He also rebutted any claims that the geological bed was unstable, revealing his great faith in modern technology, saying “it is as good as certain that no such fissure exists, and 8,000 experimental borings which have been made confirm this belief. Even if it did, *nothing is impossible to modern engineering!*”³¹⁰ Finally, he addressed those who saw it as a bad investment that would never yield a profit. To them he wrote:

I assert with complete confidence, however, that it will not only pay, but will yield a very handsome profit to its enterprising shareholders. Small minds raise the ‘won’t pay’ scare about every big new undertaking. America was warned that the Panama Canal would never pay, yet it is already so thronged with traffic that the scheme of building a parallel canal through Nicaragua is well advanced...A few years ago the States of New York and New Jersey decided to link themselves by twin tunnels for motor-traffic beneath the River Hudson. The toll charge for a car was fixed at two shillings. The scheme was laughed at...Today these “Holland tubes,” as they are called, after their builder, are so busy that police are stationed in them to keep the traffic moving...Two new tunnels are to be constructed and a huge new bridge across the Hudson as well.³¹¹

Rothermere and his cause were defeated. His dreams of a massive increase in visitors to Britain and an associated commercial boom were disappointed. Parliament rejected the proposal. Rothermere expressed his contempt for parliament and old fashioned minds in a last editorial on June 6th, 1930. In his leading article he wrote that Britons now had “one more example of the antediluvian standpoint from which our British politicians survey the world. The strategic arguments against the tunnel were never serious...The economic arguments against it are precisely those which opponents of the Panama and Suez canals and of the great Alpine tunnels urged in their time. Thus a scheme which might have brought a far-reaching development of the tourist industry in Great Britain is abandoned from sheer barnacle habits of mind.”³¹²

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 69. (italics his)

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 70.

³¹² Lord Rothermere, *Daily Mail*, June 6, 1930, p. 1.

CHAPTER SIX

“BRITAIN DEFENSELESS!”

The Campaign to Modernize National Defense

The preceding two chapters suggest a pattern in the extreme right’s discursive campaign. First, far right commentators pointed to the successful accomplishments of the authoritarian powers, very often those of technological advance or large scale engineering. They saw them as threats to Britain’s international position, of course, but this was not the fault of the dictatorships. The dictators were simply moving with the times. Far right authors then used these modernizing accomplishments as benchmarks against which to measure Britain’s democratic leaders. In Britain they saw a vital and talented community of inventors and engineers, but Governments and politicians who were constitutionally incapable of putting them to optimal use. These criticisms were extended by the furthest right of the critics, to be examples of the limitations of the entire parliamentary system. Democratic party squabbles and limited authority all resulted in a fear of decisive action; a fear of political risk; a very terror of the new and untested. In no area was this pattern of criticism more often repeated than in the area of national defense and armaments.

Scholars sometimes miss the combination of views held by the extreme right as it related to rearmament. The right wing is most often associated with favorable impressions of the dictators and a policy to appease them. These were the “Guilty Men,” who ignored armaments and intervention. The Conservative-led Governments of Baldwin and Chamberlain first rejected rearmament, then embarked on a string of actions and non-actions that allowed Hitler and Mussolini to expand with very little resistance. The Party line sought to reach an understanding with the dictatorships, not to provoke war through an arms race. That small Tory contingent in

Parliament who did call for rearmament, did so out of a belief that the fascist governments of Germany and Italy represented a dire threat and had to be confronted or eliminated.³¹³ It follows that some find it strange that pro-fascists of the extreme right were so enthusiastic for rearmament. Sir Ian Kershaw, for instance, writes: “the right wing press advocated moderation and the attempt to construct cordial relations with Germany as with other nations. *Curiously*, it was the *Daily Mail*, the newspaper most sympathetic to Nazi Germany...which was the strongest proponent of rapid rearmament...”³¹⁴ Studying the extreme right as a distinct group, however, it is not curious at all, but perfectly in character. It was in fact this combination of views (pro-fascism *and* radical pro-rearmament) that help define them as a separate political entity. In the modern world, they said, every nation must be made militarily lethal in order to be respected and to survive. That lethality had to be provided by cutting edge science and technology. Once the modernized powers had proven themselves “worthy” and reached this point, deterrence would ensure peace. Meanwhile, nations that fell behind would be absorbed or obliterated. Francis Yeats-Brown illustrates the point in his book European Jungle. Yeats-Brown was no enemy of the dictators. He had nothing but the highest respect for Mussolini, even writing that “Mussolini is a genius, a man such as appears but rarely in the centuries.” Still, Mussolini had invaded Abyssinia in 1935, and if Britain were to offer any meaningful challenge to his aggression, it would have to speak the language of the new world. Toothless sanctions were an

³¹³ See Lynn Olson’s , Troublesome Young Men. This small contingent, led by Churchill, included L.S. Amery, Harold MacMillan and Bob Boothby among others. They produced virtually no material change before the War except their own isolation within the Conservative Party. They did, however, lay the foundation for the sea-change that would see Chamberlain replaced by Churchill in May, 1940.

³¹⁴ Kershaw, Making Friends with Hitler, p. 35. (italics mine).

embarrassment, he said. Better by far to meet Mussolini with strength. That would enable genuine dialogue between equals.

I do not believe that it (the Abyssinian conquest) was meant to force our hand, or to provoke war. But war will be inevitable if we do not answer in a language Mussolini understands; by action, not protests; by armed strength, combined with a readiness to negotiate...Mussolini is NOT a man of peace. His views, plainly stated, are that perpetual peace is an impossibility.³¹⁵

An *Evening News* editorial (which was re-printed in the *Saturday Review*) makes this point of view abundantly clear. The editorial again concerns the problematic nature of British sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinian crisis, but its implications extended more widely. Though short and concise, the re-printed excerpt remains a crystallization of the extreme right world view.

There are no peace-loving nations. All are pugnacious; but whereas some incline to war in the military sense, others prefer to be combative and domineering with their tongues. All nations want peace when it is profitable, and are ready to go to war if there is no easier way of getting what they badly want. There is no such thing as international friendship. Apart from racial enmity, there is only one international emotion – a grudging respect for strength and success.³¹⁶

The extreme right thought of itself as rational enough to face these kinds of dark realities. Even as Britain went to war, those like C. G. Grey marveled at others who could not bring themselves to face the true animal-competitive nature between peoples and nations.

What a game it all is! And there are quite a lot of really honest good people trying to persuade themselves that human nature can be reformed. What a hope! I know my history of the past 5,000 years fairly well and upon my soul, I can't see any difference in the level of intelligence and the moral outlook of the average human being. A bit disappointing isn't it. And yet what fun it all is.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, p. 88.

³¹⁶ "Why Sanctions?" *Saturday Review* (reprinted from *Evening News*), December 14, 1935, p. ii.

³¹⁷ Letter from Grey to Luttman-Johnson, Luttman-Johnson Papers, HL-J1-43.

Others, they thought, (including the left, free-market Liberals, and even “party-line” Tory Conservatives) were forming their political alternatives based on a world they *wished* existed. And that was a suicidal delusion. This underlying view of humanity and politics helps us to understand the frantic exasperation of the extreme right’s written discourse, especially where it concerned modernizing the fighting forces.

“Disarmament Means War”

One source of the far right’s infuriation was the attempts by successive Governments to reach collective agreements for disarmament. The “spirit of Locarno,” so popular in the late 1920’s, by the early 1930’s was laughable to them. One after the other, disarmament conferences secured little, especially with the withdrawal of Italy and Germany from the League and from all disarmament discussions. The fascist nations, thought the extreme right, were confronting reality in a new world where modern weapons made constant readiness essential. Virtually all British politicians remembered the Great War with horror, and did all in their power to avoid any such conflict erupting again. But, said the far right, had Britain been well armed at the outset of that conflict, the horrors and carnage of 1914-18, could have been greatly reduced. As early as 1929, Arnold Leese quoted Lord Allenby, the Chief Commander of Britain’s Eastern Campaign, as saying “If we could have sent across the Channel six divisions and a cavalry corps in August 1914, we might have been saved the retreat from Mons and the early days of the War might have had a very different complexion.” Leese added, “We ask all members of the IFL to note these words and to use them against those who would disarm us.”³¹⁸ Rothermere made the same

³¹⁸ Arnold Leese, *The Fascist*, Sept. 1929, p. 2, (clipping from F.T. Cooper Papers, IFL collection).

point in his book Warnings and Predictions and connected the lack of armament in 1914 to the shortcomings of democratic politics.

Parliamentary sloth and party squabbles led us unprepared into the last war, and sent millions helpless and ill-armed to slaughter. Too many men in all walks of life scorned preparedness, jeered at officers and despised soldiers: until a few months ago many did so still. After the War Parliament sat by while the Armed Forces were destroyed – and officers and men thrown on to the street to take the dole or compete as best they could in the commercial world for which they were as ill-equipped as mill-owners and bankers would be for military command. We looked to others to give us security, and shirked the duty of full rearmament and national service until a few months ago.³¹⁹

The new environment of European politics, they believed, surely warranted the utmost preparedness; disarmament would simply invite invasion. And while both Italy's and Germany's rearmament was a threat on one hand, it was an example on the other. Another British fascist, William Sanderson of the IFL, wrote of the relationship between war, modern arms, deterrence, and their link to the development of nations. His comments laid bare the core (and very dark) fascist belief that violent struggle conditioned the nation into its optimal strength and maximum potential. He wrote, "Peace is the outcome of overwhelming military strength. Weakness leads to massacres and decadence, and there is no exception to this rule... We cannot survive without war, and there is no progress without it."³²⁰ In 1934 the *Saturday Review*, which always supported Mussolini as a genius, ran an issue focused on disarmament, which looked to the Duce for wisdom on the subject. That particular issue printed Mussolini's own statements on the situation between Japan and Russia. He praised Japan for its "dynamic imperialism, industrial organization, sobriety, unlimited capacity for sacrifice, and her formidable armies, fleets, and air

³¹⁹ Lord Rothermere, Warnings and Predictions (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1939), p. 231.

³²⁰ William Sanderson, "The Duty of Military Proficiency," Uncited clipping from the IFL Collection, F. T. Cooper Papers, 181/2/32.

force.” At the same time, he predictably disparaged Russia for its position of weakness. War, it seemed, was in the air, said Mussolini, and that potential conflict could easily involve the European powers. In a subsequent article titled, “What Mussolini Teaches Us,” an author with the pseudonym “Kim” wrote of the current British policy relative to Mussolini’s observations.

We come then to a world situation fraught with great danger. Italy’s Prime Minister, the clearest minded statesman of his day, the outstanding figure in the world of diplomacy, warns us plainly of the potentialities that confront all the Powers, and especially Britain, with her responsibilities and commitments in the Far East – and what is our Government doing about it? They are apparently doing nothing. Their minds seem set obstinately on one achievement and one alone, disarmament. Disarmament, while the present combustible state of things exists in the Far East and in Europe a regular cauldron of trouble seems to be brewing! Disarmament! What a chimera! What optimists!...When we consider the mental abyss between such men as Mussolini and Ramsay MacDonald, we begin to understand why country after country is turning towards Fascism as the only possible off-set to the internationalism of politicians like Mr. MacDonald.³²¹

Rothermere used his *Daily Mail*, among other publications, to launch a continuous campaign for Britain’s rearmament and the modernization of its forces. That campaign will be examined more closely later in the chapter. But, in his earliest piece of the campaign (November of 1933), he blasted the Government for its delusionary disarmament objectives. The editorial ran under the headline, “Disarmament Means War,” and listed some of the ominous realities associated with the new Nazi state, though never being critical of it. His criticism is saved for MacDonald’s Government, saying that “The Socialist Party once more demanded yesterday in the House of Commons that Great Britain should still further reduce her already attenuated armaments. *It is a mad suggestion. In the present state of the world disarmament means war.* No country with such vast possessions as ours can expect to live long on sufferance.”³²² In a subsequent editorial

³²¹ “Kim,” “What Mussolini Teaches Us,” *Saturday Review*, February 3, 1934, p. 118.

³²² Lord Rothermere, “Disarmament Means War,” *Daily Mail*, November 14th, 1933, p. 8.

titled, “What the Next War will be Like,” he specifically referenced the Disarmament Conference of 1932. Here he wrote:

As far back as February 1932 the Government, in introducing the Air Estimates said: ‘Despite general recognition of the growing dependence of the British Empire on air power, as on sea power, the serious disparity between the first-line strength of the Royal Air Force and foreign air services remains...His Majesty’s Government would view the situation with anxiety but for their earnest hope and expectation that the Disarmament Conference will bring about a reduction in air armaments.’ This was twenty one months ago, and there are still foolish people looking for some practical results from that conference. We cannot afford to go on being defended by ‘earnest hopes and expectations’ that have no foundation of fact.³²³

The press campaign against the “folly of disarmament,” then brought out some of the recurring themes of the far right ideology. These included the trust and admiration of figures like Mussolini, and the grudging respect for powers like Germany and Japan even though they loomed as potential threats. Specific British Governments and the democratic system in general came in for criticism for their failure to produce men who could understand and manage the harsh environment of the modern world. Another dimension of the pro-fascist view can be identified in the writing of J.F.C. Fuller on the subject. Fuller, for a time a senior BUF administrator and consultant, said that fascists were able look at the situation with a scientific eye. In his article for the BUF’s journal *Fascist Quarterly* he emphasized the modern rationality of fascism in assessing the potential for war. He set this view against those who allowed their irrational emotions to guide their outlook on the subject. This is yet another example of how fascists saw their own political ideology as highly rational and scientific. While many on the left at the time (and many scholars since of all political persuasions) would interpret fascism as

³²³ Lord Rothermere, “What the Next War Will Be Like,” reprinted in My Fight to Rearm Britain, p.56.

spiritual or organic *irrationalism*, this was not at all how British fascists and pro-fascists most often presented themselves.

Fuller outlined his analysis using the metaphor of a doctor diagnosing a condition and securing the proper instruments to deal with a given disease. Adopting this clinical tone he assessed the fascist approach to war.

The outlook of Fascism upon war is a common-sense one, for the Fascist is a realist. To him it is useless slopping the problem of war over with words and anathemas, as so frequently is done by those who successfully succeeded in avoiding the last one, because emotionalism is the antithesis of realism. He is open to examine the problem as a physician examines a patient, but he refuses to be diverted by “glory” on the one side or by “horror” on the other. If the problem is solvable it will be solved scientifically, that is by seeking truth, maintaining an impartial mind and working in an orderly way. Hysteria will certainly not solve it...The Fascist therefore says: ‘I will tackle this problem causally, and until its cause or causes are eliminated I will keep in hand a stock of surgical instruments and drugs (my navies, armies and air fleets), because I see no reason to put my trust in faith cures and other quackery. Consequently I will have nothing to do with pacifist witchcraft which puts its trust in incantations, spells and pacts...he refuses to be drawn off the scent of his truth seeking by disarmament and suchlike red herrings, for weapons in themselves cannot possibly create wars any more than forceps and scalpels in themselves can create diseases...the difference between the outlook of the Fascist and most other people is: that whilst they consider war inevitable or preventable in any set of circumstances, according to peace conditions he considers war necessary or unnecessary. In fact this difference is identical to that which separates the alchemist from the man of science.’³²⁴

For the extreme right, only fascism (whether British or foreign) seemed to produce the men who could analyze the question of arms unsentimentally; with a detached rationality. It was the fascist, said Fuller, not the Liberal, Conservative, or Labourite, who was the “man of science.”

On Land: J.F.C. Fuller and Mechanization

The first area that had to be modernized, said far right critics, was Britain’s obsolete land army. There were several components to this, but the most important was to mechanize the forces. This included trucks to transport troops and supplies, updating artillery, but chiefly the

³²⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, “Fascism and War” *Fascist Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April, 1935, pp. 140-141.

adoption of tank warfare. The great machines were clearly the future of warfare on land, and Britain had been the single most important pioneer in the technology. But, the government seemed to be ignoring this strategic transition and was routinely accused by this group of “fighting the last war.” It was not just that the army had to be increased, it had to be fundamentally changed – modernized. One of the problems seemed to be that most ordinary people and virtually all of Britain’s politicians did not understand the technology. They were simply too intimidated by its complexity to produce useful policy. This led to repeated examples in the far right press of the ineptitude of those making defense decisions. One article in *Action* read, “Mr. Duff Cooper, head of our War Office, who in introducing the army Estimates for 1934-35 said ‘I have had occasion during the past year to study military affairs both in my public and private life, and the more I study them the more impressed I become by the importance of cavalry in modern warfare.’”³²⁵

One voice was by far the loudest and most ubiquitous among the proponents for modernizing Britain’s ground forces. This was Major-General J. F. C. Fuller. To begin dissecting the extreme right agenda for defense, tracing his career is a useful place to start. Fuller’s role as a pioneer in tank warfare earned him the credibility to report for numerous extreme right publications. He was a committed fascist and a member of several extreme right organizations, but did most of his work during the period for the BUF. What is most significant for this study is his consistent, almost dogmatic campaign for technical modernization and rationality of approach. Interestingly, he has been cited in works that reject or downplay the modernism of British fascism, such as Stone’s and Linehan’s. One reason is that he was also a bit of a mystic, studying the occult in his private life. This, however, should not divert our understanding of the

³²⁵ J. F. C. Fuller, “Lessons from Abyssinia,” *Action*, May 7, 1936, p. 9.

overwhelmingly central message of his political activities. He was a forward-thinking visionary, (though not always practical) especially regarding military technology. His frustration with the British military and British society was rooted in their apparent inability to analyze the world rationally and embrace modern change.

He was born in 1878 in Chichester, West Sussex, where as a child, he tells us, he grew to loathe the ordinary suburban life. Religion especially angered him, as he saw people attend church on Sunday, and then return immediately to grasping, self-absorbed behavior. This notion would stay with him throughout his career. He attended the Military Academy at Sandhurst, and then shipped out to the Boer War from 1899-1902. Upon his return, he was able to attend Staff College at Camberly, which would eventually help him to obtain an officer's commission with the Machine Gun Corps. It was also during these pre-war years that his flirtation with mysticism was at its height. Fuller came to be a friend and correspondent of the notorious mystic and Satanist, Alistair Crowley. It should be noted, however, that by 1911 Fuller's letters show clearly a falling out with Crowley and that Fuller wanted nothing more to do with the man. After the War, Crowley's pleas for Fuller's renewed friendship and participation in his journal were met with only curt rejections. While Fuller remained interested in the "unknowable," according to his words, the War clearly jarred him loose from mysticism and its questionable community.³²⁶

³²⁶ See Fuller-Crowley letters, IV/12, JFC Fuller Papers, Liddell-Hart Center, King's College, London. In some letters Fuller and Crowley seem to have used symbols to address one another, rather than names. Crowley's symbol was the pentagram, while Fuller's was a swastika. These letters date from 1910. As the Nazi regime took shape in Germany with the swastika as its symbol and its own variety of fascism as its creed, one wonders what impact this may have had on Fuller, and if he felt some kind of spiritual bond based on the symbolism. But in his political writing Fuller shows little regard for spirituality or emotion.

His negative impressions of the world in his formative years colored his early writings. But, eventually, he said, he arrived at the rather disillusioning conclusion that the vast majority of people were not fundamentally rational. Thus, it was irrational for him to continue to berate them for their lack of rationality. Forever after he searched for some kind of synthesis in formulating his metaphysical view of the world. Eventually he embraced fascism. It might seem that Fuller's thinking is a case in point for those who point to the tension of modern and anti-modern in fascist ideology. This may be. But, his career and subsequent writings are not filled with these tensions or paradoxes, but instead reflect a ruthless pursuit of what he called realism and rationality. Taking his mysticism and philosophical musings in context, when we examine the work he produced for the extreme right's political movement, it is almost completely unsentimental and clinical in tone, and his overwhelming focus was technological modernization.

In the Great War Fuller was part of the group that developed and deployed the tank. His Machine gun Corps would eventually evolve into the Tank Corps. Records indicate that he was a highly productive officer formulating strategies for battle tactics, and tank deployment via ship and rail. He also produced the first treatises on communications and signaling as well as the need for maintenance and support stations.³²⁷ He formulated the strategies for the tank offensives at Cambrai and the autumn offensives of 1918. He also devised a tank-intensive plan for a decisive maneuver that would end the war, titled "Plan 1919." Fortunately, this did not need to be carried out as fighting ceased in 1918. But, despite all his accomplishments, Fuller was frustrated at the lack of attention the potential of tanks received from senior staff. Even

³²⁷ "Signaling and Communications," "the History, Organization, Tactics and Training of Tanks," "A Tank Army," Fuller Papers, I/4/5, I/8/3, I/9/1.

during the days of the Great War, Fuller recognized that the future of military operations would be with mechanized forces and that emphasis on infantry should seriously diminish. He wrote in an Army memo, “Unless this war ends in a disarmament and a temporary universal peace, there can be little doubt that the present unarmoured and unprotected soldier will cease to exist and a tank army will take his place.”³²⁸ Few listened.

After the War Fuller remained in the Army and commanded the “Experimental Brigade,” at Aldershot, and worked with his junior B. H. Liddell-Hart to develop future tank technology and strategy. His post-war career, however, assumed a frustrating pattern. Fuller wrote prolifically on the lessons of the Great War and on what future war would be like. He was the leading prophet of mechanized warfare in Britain. But, in military circles he was seen as something of a crank, and his predictions about remote controlled planes, submarine cargo craft, and armies made up of tanks rather than soldiers, struck Britain’s staid military types as fanciful. After his retirement in 1933, his writings changed tone, from optimistic predictions to disgust and exasperation. The British political system, it seemed to him, was producing men who refused to face the obvious and inevitable progression toward a future of technological warfare. As it had in 1914, Britain was preparing to “fight the last war”—or perhaps even the one before that. His writing became more and more strident during the 1930’s as he attempted to shock the general public (he had given up on the military community) into awareness. In Germany, however, military minds did not ignore Fuller’s works. General Guderian, for example, took them quite seriously and would use these same ideas in the Second World War. As with the works of Charles De Gaulle (who also wrote works on tank warfare), Fuller’s theories were adopted by the Nazi Army and contributed to their modernizing of forces and tactics. Later, Fuller’s close

³²⁸ J.F.C. Fuller, “A Tank Army,” Fuller Papers, I/9/1.



Major-General J. F. C. Fuller (far left) reviewing tank operations with King George V during the Great War.

association with British fascism earned him a visit to Nazi Germany in 1939 where he was allowed on the stand with Hitler to watch a fully motorized army pass before him. Hitler turned to him and said, “I hope you were pleased with your children.” Fuller is said to have replied “Your Excellency, they have grown up so quickly, I hardly recognize them.”

In examining his writings, as part of the extreme right’s campaign for modern defense, a number of prominent themes appear and we shall examine them in detail. The first of these is simply that the future of warfare belonged to machines and that Britain’s military minds were too obtuse to grasp this. In his autobiographical Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier (1936), he said that the split in the debate about tank power had occurred early in the First World War. There developed a clash that “occurred between the Tank Corps and GHQ. Whilst the latter was tactically constitutional, the former was compelled to be revolutionary. It was a clash between two schools of thought, one relying on memory and the other imagination.”³²⁹ But, he said, tactics counted far less than arms; technology determined the outcome in warfare. The finest strategist or charismatic General was irrelevant in the face of newly effective weaponry.

In all wars, and especially modern wars—wars in which weapons change rapidly—no army of fifty years before any date selected would stand a “dog’s chance” against the army existing at this date, not even if it were composed entirely of Winkelrieds and Marshal Neys. Napoleon was an infinitely greater general than Lord Raglan; yet Lord Raglan would, in 1855, have beaten any army Napoleon, in 1805, could have led against him, because Lord Raglan’s men were armed with the Minie rifle...From this we may deduce the fact, which has already been stated, namely, that weapons form 99 per cent. of victory, consequently the General Staff of every army should be composed of mechanical clairvoyants, seers of new conditions, new fields of war to exploit, and new tools to assist in this exploitation.³³⁰

³²⁹J. F. C. Fuller, Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1936), p. vii.

³³⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, Tanks in the Great War (London: Murray, 1923), p. 308.

His call for visionaries is one he would emphasize time and again in his writing. He goes on to speak of the necessity for the military to be run by the “soldier mechanic” who could create new devices and defend against those of the enemy. But, sadly for Fuller, the collective mind of Britain’s military remained closed, or as he said, “unconvinced, and not even the most powerful imagination can open it. The fact is that the soldier has an inborn horror of science. Mentally living in an intellectual age at least a generation gone, science antagonizes him directly he is confronted with it professionally.” Such unscientific thinking he described as “the ‘Haig-mind;’ that is a mind that can receive impressions, but which cannot formulate judgments. It can swallow the past and vomit it forth undigested; but it cannot foresee, let alone create the future.” This, he lamented, was illustrated unmistakably when his earlier book The Foundations of the Science of War (1926) was met “Not by criticism, but by personal abuse.” Meanwhile, he said more modern societies like America (and Germany, though he did not mention it) had taken his works on scientific warfare as “their Bible.”³³¹

Next, he emphasized that the weaponry of a nation had to be in touch with the cutting edge of its non-military scientific and technological development. To have weaponry lagging behind general scientific advance was suicidal. This danger was connected closely to what Fuller saw as the disastrous policy of disarmament.

Throughout history they (tools of war) have been related to the tools of peace: thus a wood-feller’s axe may be used as a battle axe, and it is but a short step from any modern automatic machine to a machine weapon. In brief, the history of weapon evolution is governed by the progress of the technical sciences—the progress of civilization—and cannot be separated from it; therefore to complain of air bombardments or the use of lethal gas, etc. is folly, and to attempt to prohibit their use is foolishness; because, so long as the causes of war remain, they will endure.³³²

³³¹ Fuller, Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier, pp. 457-458.

³³² J. F. C. Fuller Towards Armageddon: The Defense Problem and its Solution (London: Lovat Dickson, 1937), p. 128.

Rather than disarmament conferences, he said, only the consistent development of technological modernity and its application to defense could create security. He foresaw the world of “Deterrence,” and “Mutually Assured Destruction,” though he perceived this not as a nightmare, but in reassuring terms.

War will be eliminated by weapons, not by words or treaties or leagues of nations: by weapons – leagues of tanks, aeroplanes and submarines—which will render opposition hopeless or retribution so terrible that nations will think, not once or twice, but many times before going to war... Surely it is far more likely that warlike inventions, rather than peaceful sentiments, will one day be able to whisper into the ears of this troubled world ---*Pax vobiscum*.³³³

To reach this point, nations had to understand that they must develop and accumulate the most modern weapons possible and in great numbers. Britain’s Governments of the early 1930’s were not pursuing this strategy and Fuller wrote extensively about the shortcomings of the nation’s anemic military progress. If the Great War had not been enough of a lesson, he thought, perhaps a more immediate conflict would drive home the message. So Fuller accepted the job of special correspondent in Abyssinia for Rothermere’s *Daily Mail* and also wrote on the subject routinely for the BUF’s *Action*. In an article titled “Lessons from Ethiopia,” Fuller described the success of cutting edge weapons against an infantry-based force. In the Great War European armies had

surged against mass infantry, erected wired cages called trench systems, and from behind their entanglements, like cattle they bellowed at each other. In 1936 what do we see? The Negus and his hordes are pulverized by air power long before sanctions can take effect, whilst the Italian soldiers are moved forward in lorries to occupy the bomb-conquered territories... What are we preparing for? A war of scientific weapons? No! Instead a war of democratic saurian contests; massed struggles, massed slaughtering, and massed destruction; in three words – 1914 over again! We watch hordes of armed men pulverized on the shores of Lake Ascianghi and aeroplanes flying 700 miles to Addis Ababa and back in seven hours; yet all we can think about is infantry and cavalry. If this

³³³ Fuller, *Memoirs*, p. 455.

is not insanity, what is?—for tactically speaking in the next war we shall find that we have applied military sanctions against ourselves.³³⁴

Britain's Governments and military staff had continued, according to Fuller, preparing for the conflicts of a by-gone era and could not even see the value of mechanization as it was demonstrated before their eyes.

Instead of embracing tanks in the years following 1918, “directly the War ended all new arms were virtually abolished, and since that date millions have been spent upon cavalry!”³³⁵ By 1918, said Fuller, “we built up the most powerful tank force possessed by any belligerent, and it proved itself to be the master land arm. In spite of this, for eighteen years now we have done next to nothing to develop this arm.” Not only were the tanks utterly neglected, but “our artillery is weak,” and “we are incomparably inferior to most continental armies in anti-tank weapons.”³³⁶ Fuller's vision of mechanized tank warfare that would adopt naval-style tactics on land, was being left to rot. This must have been excruciating for him from a patriotic point of view, but also from a personal point of view. It is obvious from his writing that he was personally injured by the military's dismissal of his insight, and this would seem to have contributed to his hatred of democracy in favor of fascism. With the fascists, he found a political group that spoke the same language of technical modernity, and accepted his military philosophy readily. Like A. V. Roe, Merandaz, and Nuffield, Fuller had been a technological pioneer. And like another pioneer, Eckersley, his technical vision had been ignored or tossed aside; their writings have the similar ring of the exasperated visionary unable to convey that vision to seemingly pedestrian minds.

³³⁴ J.F.C. Fuller, “Lessons from Ethiopia,” *Action*, May 7, 1936, p.9.

³³⁵ Fuller, Towards Armageddon, p. 24.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.212.

This brings us to another theme of Fuller's; that the flawed shape of Britain's defense forces was a direct reflection of its flawed political system – parliamentary democracy. One point Fuller made consistently was that the masses of humanity that went into infantry-intense armies were, in his words, “the military expression of democracy.” It was to him “little more than the military instrument of a bankrupt age—the shattered and ruined nineteenth century. In idea and largely in form it belongs to the civilization of the plough and not of the field tractor, and the cab and not of the motor-car...it is organically and spiritually the pre-war Army – that is, the Army before the great revelation; an army based on the idea of mass and not on the idea of power.”³³⁷ Like so many of the extreme right that we have seen, Fuller was disgusted with democracy. It was a system, to him, that produced and rewarded those who toed the party line, who took no risks. It was incapable of generating or elevating men of real vision, who could assess technological modernity and harness it for the benefit of the nation. Like the military leaders, democratic politicians were averse to modernity and could not be bothered with matters they did not understand.

This prevented a unified approach in which all three services could develop complimentary technologies and strategies under a central command office— another of Fuller's great priorities. In assessing how Britain's new military should be organized, said Fuller, the first question to be asked was “what was each branch to be used for?”

But, no, our National Government does not think so, and in its stead substitutes “What have they been?” And answers this question: “Three separate forces,” therefore three separate forces they must remain. It is true that tactically their functions differ, as in transportation do the functions of locomotives, steamships and motor-cars. Yet, though it is possible to co-ordinate the operations of these three types of vehicles and place them under the direction of one Company, according to Mr. Baldwin it is not possible to do so with the three Services, and why? Apparently because he cannot see that defense is one

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

problem and not three problems; and though a few years ago the Government was engaged upon unilateral disarmament, now it is engaged upon tri-lateral rearmament.³³⁸

What was worse, Baldwin didn't even seem to be interested in, let alone courageously facing, the rapidly gathering storm. Fuller wrote that in 1933, as disarmament talks broke down, the Committee for Imperial Defense was not able to convey the perilous state of Britain's defenses to the Cabinet. "And why? Apparently because its Chairman, the Prime Minister, could not find time wherein to attend its meetings."³³⁹ He later quoted Baldwin himself in a series of rather frightening passages regarding the inadequacy of democracy for dealing with world turmoil, including:

"One of the weaknesses of democracy, a system of which I am trying to make the best, is that until it is right up against it, it will never face the truth."

"Democratic countries with a Parliamentary system are handicapped, compared to those other countries, by having to deal with all these matters (defense) in public."

"I have stated that democracy is always two years behind the dictator. I believe that to be true. It has been true in this case (rearmament)... You will remember the election at Fulham in the autumn of 1933... You will remember perhaps that the National Government candidate who made a most guarded reference to the question of defense was mobbed for it... Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and that we must rearm, does anyone think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at the moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain."³⁴⁰

These comments are undoubtedly indictments of Baldwin and his refusal to assume leadership in matters crucial to the nation's survival. Baldwin preferred to ensure his own position. That he made them openly suggests he was so entrenched in the game of party politics that he did not recognize they would be seen as shockingly unethical. But, Fuller took these

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p.230-231.

comments not just to be indictments of Baldwin as an individual, but as an indictment of the entire democratic system. The politicians' failure of vision, their scientific ineptitude, and their lack of courage were the logical results of the system that produced them. Again his rejection of liberal democracy revolves around its inability to *be* modern in a world which demanded it.

Is this the best a democratic government is capable of? Possibly not, yet it is something approaching the best, because it is not possible for an out-of-date political system to solve an up-to-date military problem; as impossible as it would be for a group of men whose knowledge was limited to the working of stage coaches to organize a modern railway...our defense defects are not inherent in the Services themselves, but in our political system...In this age of more and more exact scientific experiment and of highly specialized work, of calculating machines and of automatic machinery which exclude human errors, the dominant fact is – method. In other words, we find the discipline of the laboratory, of the workshop, of the factory, of the office and of the shop; every form of efficiency is dependent upon method. There is a right way and a wrong way of doing things, and the right way pays...Therefore it should be obvious that in a scientific age the rule of thumb and happy-go-lucky system of democracy cannot efficiently prepare a nation for war.³⁴¹

Britain's internal conflict over the modernization of defense, like the wider international struggle, was just another expression of the conflict between the past and the future. As he described it, "Two centuries now in clinch – the nineteenth and twentieth; mass and power, body and mind..." and only fascism, "a kind of scientific illuminism," was fit for the modern age.³⁴²

On the Seas: "A Parade of Tragedy"

Extreme right authors were acutely sensitive to Britain's diminishing status as a naval power. Britain having ruled the waves for two centuries, reductions in ships and an aging fleet outraged those who thought that security could only be achieved through strength. That the fleet was being reduced relative to other powers was only the first point of protest. As in the arguments for a mechanized army, the far right believed that the Royal Navy had to be updated and actually

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 35, 230.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 229.

re-configured to meet the demands brought about by new technologies. Following the familiar pattern of protest, they held up the fascist powers as examples, while Britain's democratic politicians absorbed the blame for the nation's being left behind. Again the largest extreme right publications led the charge. But there were other leading critics like former Navy officers Barry Domvile and Charles Domville-Fife, who could address technical details as well as denounce the government.

The *Saturday Review* was probably the most stridently critical of Naval reductions. Its authors especially targeted the London Treaty of 1930, which prohibited Britain building new heavy fighting ships (capital ships—Battleships and Battle-cruisers) until after 1936. In 1935, Captain Bernard Acworth, R. N. wrote a column detailing the Royal Navy's diminished arsenal. He lamented the reduced numbers, but also sought to expose that even those numbers that remained were deceptive. The cause was again the suicidal and misguided policy of disarmament.

When the "cease fire" bugle sounded on November 1918, the British Navy was supreme... That so great a Navy must undergo drastic reductions in subsequent years was never disputed by anybody, and certainly not by Naval Officers, who loyally tightened their belts for the wholesale reductions... In earlier days economy, and that alone, dictated the reductions, but today, though economy is necessarily a vital matter, the chief cause of our weakness at sea is to be found... chiefly in the Pacifist doctrine that the surest guarantee against National defeat is a total inability to prevent it... The 124 cruisers with which we commenced the late war proved inadequate, a fact which is now a matter of history. A late Board of Admiralty, under political pressure, accepted 70 as our minimum needs. This figure was subsequently reduced, to placate Geneva, to the 50 now under construction. It must be remembered, however, that at least ten will be in harbor refitting, re-fueling and resting, thus leaving 40 cruisers for service at sea. Of these 40, certainly not less than 20 will be required for their essential duties with the battle fleets... We are now reduced to 20 cruisers for the defense of British trade throughout the world.³⁴³

³⁴³ Bernard Acworth, "The Menace at Sea," *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1935, p.136.

Lt. Commander Kenneth Edwards voiced a similar complaint after covering the Royal Navy Review at Spithead in 1933. His review told a tale of British inferiority thinly veiled by spectacle. If the pomp and circumstance were removed, said Edwards, and one could “pierce the smoke of saluting guns with the cold eye of reason what do we see?” he asked. His answer was, “a parade of tragedy—nothing less.” Many of the so-called warships, he claimed, were actually “depot ships, tenders, surveying ships—there was even a ferry steamer there, classed as a warship. And of the remainder the greater portion were obsolete ships which should have been replaced long since...” It wasn’t necessarily the age of ships that made them obsolete, of course. It was the pace of technical advance. This, he said, was the problem with the London Treaty (disarmament agreement), which designated operating years for newly commissioned and existing warships. Ships with a twenty year operating life could be made obsolete overnight, but the London Treaty would prevent Britain from replacing the craft, before that twenty year period, with an up-to-date model. Further down the article, under the sub-head “Britain Left Behind,” he wrote of Britain’s now outdated battle fleet.

The Queen Elizabeth is over twenty years old and the remainder are a little younger. But the fact that these ships are obsolete is not due so much to their years as to the building of other nations. The German “pocket battleships” and the French Dunkerques make these ships obsolete, for, in spite of the fact they are more lightly armed, they have sufficient margin of speed to run rings round these old ships of ours...In destroyers and submarines also, a large amount of the tonnage at Spithead was obsolete. Numbers of them will never again fly a commissioning pennant...Spithead from the material point of view, was certainly a parade of tragedy.³⁴⁴

New submarine technology was another source of anxiety. By the mid 1930’s it was clear that Germany was building a formidable submarine fleet. Meanwhile, the far right saw Britain’s limited construction of submarines as dangerous. Britain’s negotiated treaties seemed to be a

³⁴⁴ Kenneth Edwards, “Spithead Under Review,” *Saturday Review*, July 1933, pp. 939-940.

written invitation to eventual naval parity. Some authors wrote with near panic about Germany's coming parity with the British submarine fleet.

In submarines the German programme provides for the building of no fewer than 28 vessels. This is considerably more than was generally anticipated. The speed at which Germany is building these vessels is demonstrated by the fact that the first submarine was actually in commission only eleven days after the conclusion of the Anglo-German Agreement, and that two more are already in the water...And Germany, although having declared that she will be content with a 45 per cent. ratio to the British Navy in this category – although this ratio was a tonnage ratio – has already provided in this programme for the construction of submarines which will give her a *numerical* ratio of 65 per cent. in submarines relative to the British Empire.³⁴⁵

But, at least submarines were modern weapons. In the realm of ships, they said, Britain's fleet was near rusting. The theme of Britain's fleet being hopelessly out-of-date was again trumpeted in an article with the headline "Scrap our Suicide Ships!" The anonymous author's tone was one of tangible anxiety at Britain's naval obsolescence. Britain, it seemed, had learned nothing since the last war: "Suicide ships – a famous admiral invented the term – are too old for their job. We learned how dangerous they could be during the war. Our older vessels were easily outclassed in battle by more modern German ships." Instead of relying on models that were already out of date, the article recommended scrapping the London Treaty and moving forward with new designs:

The modernization of the fleet is long overdue. The motor car of 1914 is a crude affair compared with this year's models. Similarly, how can the Queen Elizabeth, designed two years before the war, hope to meet on equal terms the new battleships building and projected by France and Italy? ... The example of Germany has been followed elsewhere. During the years in which the British Navy has been neglected in the interests of economy and unilateral disarmament, every other nation has been building ships which, whether designed for that purpose or not, have the ability to strike at the arteries of our existence to a degree never before attained in surface warship design. And still the British Navy is tied by treaty obligations. Not only do we do nothing to remedy the situation, but we are proposing to carry out the letter of the moribund treaties to the

³⁴⁵ "Germany's Naval Power," *Saturday Review*, July 20, 1935, pp. 905-906.

extent of scrapping ships which, in default of newer and better vessels, might stand between us and starvation.³⁴⁶

Clearly, the call was out for Britain to modernize its fleet. There was unanimity among the far right in its belief that “we need a new Navy, and a Navy constructed on the most up-to-date modern lines.”³⁴⁷ But, there was not unanimous agreement on just how the fleet of the future should look. A debate emerged within the extreme right press over whether the enormous and heavier armed battleships should be made the centerpiece for the future. Lt. Commander P. K. Kemp was convinced that this remained the best strategy. He wrote, “There has been a lot of talk recently as to the future of the big ship. Critics, both for them and against, have aired their views in the press and elsewhere, though frequently with a singular lack of knowledge on the subject. The big ship, whether battleship or battle-cruiser, has a very definite place in the formation of a fleet and so far the ingenuity of man has been unable to invent anything to take its place.” He went on to dismiss the critics who rejected the battleship because of its cost. Regardless of cost, he said, there was no technology that could replace it. Quite simply, “against anything but a ship of her own caliber, a battleship is invincible. And secondly, the only answer to a battleship is a battleship. That is the position in a nutshell.”³⁴⁸

Others, however, disputed the value of the massive ships in favor of speed and mobility. This position emerged in the pages of the *Daily Mail* as a result of the experimental war game exercises that took place between Britain’s air and naval forces in the summer of 1933. In these exercises, the air corps was victorious, mostly due to its mobility. Following this story, articles

³⁴⁶ “Scrap our Suicide Ships!” *Saturday Review*, October 12, 1935, p. 304-305.

³⁴⁷ “Our Needs in the Air,” *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1933, p. 9.

³⁴⁸ P. K. Kemp, “Big or Little Ships,” *Saturday Review*, May 19, 1934, p. 568.

followed which urged the development of faster, nimbler vessels and the need for lighter ships to get priority in any Naval building program. One article was written by Hubert Scott Paine, designer of the Miss Britain III speedboat, which had set the world water-speed record. His piece appeared under the headline, “Mile a Minute Navy Sea Battles of the Future – Speed Not Strength Will Win.” Paine elaborated on the pressure placed on naval designers by the rapid development of aircraft. Ships would have to be able to change direction instantly, and travel at far higher speeds. “The thing is not a dream,” he said, “it can be done and must be done if there is to be any future to the Navy... Battleships that can steam a mile a minute and turn with the quickness of a speedboat, and out maneuver any attacking aircraft will form the Navy of the Future.”³⁴⁹

The *Daily Mail* also ran an article in 1933 that covered military exercises for Britain’s lighter cruisers. The piece, written by Rothermere’s naval correspondent, Montague Smith, was a warning about the Navy’s serious deficiencies in the area of its cruiser fleet. The exercises had to be called off because of stormy weather. Destroyers had to be used in place of cruisers, and these models in the fleet were not reliable enough to stand up to bad weather conditions. The headline shouted “BRITAIN’S SHORTAGE OF CRUISERS, Revealed in Naval Exercises, ‘Battle’ Called Off, Anxiety in High Quarters.” Smith warned the public of the deepening crisis.

A very valuable lesson may be learned from the fact that the naval “war” between England and Scotland was called off at midnight last night owing to stormy weather. The lesson is one already apparent to naval men, and one which they consider the British public also should learn without delay – namely, the serious shortage of cruisers now existing. In actual warfare an attack such as was intended today by the Royal Fleet would have depended for success mainly on the presence of sufficient cruisers of a class of 5,000 tons or thereabouts. They are not available. To make up the deficiency we had to pretend in the scheme of operations that destroyers were such cruisers... As only sham

³⁴⁹ Hubert Scott Paine, “Mile a Minute Navy Sea Battles of the Future,” *Daily Mail*, October 4, 1933, p. 4.

cruisers were to operate, the weather made it impossible. I should be failing in my duty if I did not point out that in high naval circles, this deficiency is regarded with grave anxiety, and it is hoped that the Government will take adequate steps to remedy it in the next shipbuilding programme.³⁵⁰

Perhaps the most qualified of the far right naval critics was Admiral Sir Barry Domvile. In 1937, Domvile published his book Look to Your Moat. It was a mix of history and some autobiography. But, first and foremost it was a manifesto for re-shaping the British Naval fleet in view of the changing political and technical environment. Domvile's belief was in producing the greatest number of ships in order to overwhelm other fleets, but he did not dismiss the great battleships. These were still necessary. However, he was a firm believer that new production could not ignore the cruiser, a ship which allowed greater speed and mobility. They also were more economical to build and could be produced faster. The great battleships needed to stay, he said, but Britain could not put her eggs in one basket. To engineer ever larger leviathans was a losing proposition; smaller ships had to be added in numbers and quickly.

If an increase in the size of ships rendered a reduction in the numbers required possible, there would be something to say in favor of a larger ship. But, this is not so. No ship, however big, can be in two places at the same time, and the minimum number of units required for the battle fleet is determined on entirely different considerations... Mutual agreement for a considerable reduction in the size of battleships is not obtainable... It is the United States of America, the land whose geographical position gives her a blessed national security which no other country possesses, who will not agree to a smaller ship size than 35,000 tons. The reasons are difficult to fathom.³⁵¹

His experience commanding the lighter ships in the Mediterranean fleet certainly must have influenced his thinking on the matter. He was a great proponent of naval mobility. In terms of numbers, he was disgusted at what the Government's efforts at disarmament had wrought:

³⁵⁰ Montague Smith, "Britain's Shortage of Cruisers," *Daily Mail*, October 11, 1933, p. 5.

³⁵¹ Admiral Sir Barry Domvile, Look to Your Moat. (London: Hutchinson, 1937), p.51.



Admiral Sir Barry Domvile. Domvile led a print campaign to re-design the Royal Navy's fleet emphasizing high speed cruisers (never recognizing the future importance of air craft carriers). He also advocated a national project to build a great canal between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth. In the late 1930's he founded the Link, the most notorious of the pro-Nazi groups in Britain. As part of his Link campaigns he routinely advocated "oil from coal" to make Britain self-sufficient in the area of fuel.

“Seventy cruisers was the accepted figure for empire requirements a few years ago... Thanks to the policy of successive Governments since the War, the country is woefully short of this number today, and it is most essential to do our best to make up for past mismanagement and resulting deficiencies. Cruisers are our most crying need.”³⁵²

The characteristics of the ships, however, were not all that was necessary to have a lightning fast fleet that could be deployed and operate anywhere in the world. This mobility took infrastructure as well. “The modern fleet,” he said “is not mobile without the existence of suitably equipped repair bases where ships can be docked and refitted.” Britain needed to retain and develop further its port stations throughout the world. And this required renewed commitment to the Empire. Still, he lamented, even those large maintenance stations within the United Kingdom had been left to decay. On the Navy’s central repair station in Scotland he said, “Our most suitably sited repair base for heavy ships at Rosyth in the Firth of Forth was never brought to a successful state of conclusion after the war. This is a matter of regret.”³⁵³ He went on to press his endorsement of a large engineering project which would greatly aid both Naval and commercial shipping – a great canal through Britain. He proposed that this be forged through the island’s narrowest point, connecting the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth. In times of war, he said it would be invaluable as refuge. The new technology of aircraft had brought about this necessity with the air plane’s ability to threaten the Channel. But, as we have seen with Lord Rothermere and his promotion of the Channel Tunnel, Domvile was greatly disappointed with what he saw as the lack of imagination and enterprise of the British Government, which had not given the canal idea serious consideration.

³⁵² Ibid., p.164.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 167.

Mention was also made of the great advantage that would be derived from the construction of a big-ship canal for war vessels and a valuable reserve moat for merchantmen in the event of the English Channel being rendered untenable by hostile aircraft...However, the Admiralty view in regard to a Clyde-Forth canal had remained unchanged since it was expressed in 1919...Sixteen years is a long time, even for a Government Department to remain at anchor, whilst the world is moving rapidly.³⁵⁴

Great engineering projects, with clear value in a new and dangerous world, were scorned by a Government which would not spend the money or face the realities that made them necessary. Whatever the genuine merits and demerits of projects like the Channel Tunnel or Domvile's great canal, the outcry from far right critics was always similar: Britain's politicians could not pull themselves from their own democratic quagmire to create works of technical engineering that were essential to the nation, because they were incapable of moving with the times.

And in the Air: "We Need 5,000 War Planes!"

As widely as the debate raged about Britain's need to catch up in terms of technology and infrastructure (industry, roads, rails electrification etc.), national defense was by far the most urgent of these concerns. And of the areas of defense that had to be modernized, the air was the clearly the far right's greatest priority. There was virtual unanimity among them concerning the emergence of air planes as the technology that would dominate future war and politics. Britain's relative decline in air plane stockpiles compared to other nations alarmed the extreme right and produced some of its most vituperative press campaigns. Once again the failure of British politicians to keep pace in military air development, elicited derision of specific Ministries, personal attacks against individual politicians, and the rejection of democracy all together.

The extreme right was filled with members of the air community. These included pioneers like A. V. Roe and D.K.M. Merandaz, industrialists like Vincent Vickers and Lord Nuffield, famous airmen like Lord Semphill, Lord Clydesdale, Mosley himself, as well as government

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

officials like John Chamier and Lord Londonderry, and trade press men like C. G. Grey. The publications which these men read, and in some cases produced, regularly covered the issues of air politics and new air technologies. In any issue of Grey's *Aeroplane*, as one would expect, the merits of new wing designs, cockpit controls, and top speeds were reviewed. Likewise, in far-right non-technical publications. *The Blackshirt* (later *Action*) gave extensive coverage to the R.A.F. pageants and Dorman regularly discussed new aircraft models in development. Most often the new technologies reviewed in these publications related to air defense. In the *Saturday Review*, for instance, one can find articles on the new air machine gun designs as well as the development of the motor-cannon plane.³⁵⁵ New aircraft models were constantly promoted, and there was even a review of the "remote control aeroplane," developed by the Air Ministry (Fuller's prediction had indeed materialized by 1935). But, these reviews nearly always had an acerbic edge to them. As they itemized the features of these new technologies, the articles were spiced with accusations against the government for creating obstacles to their development, for withholding funding, and squandering money on other branches of the Service.

The regular coverage of air defense issues, with its explicitly accusatory tones, was generally part of larger campaigns. During the early 1930's Grey, Houston, and especially Rothermere carried on sustained campaigns for air modernization and rearmament (those of Lady Houston and Lord Rothermere being especially nasty). Grey, for instance, found no problem with Nazi Germany arming itself in the air. He felt, along with most others on the far right, that peace was best maintained through the formula of deterrence. In 1933 he wrote, "Germany has a perfect right to re-arm. The Germans, like ourselves, are a home-loving and peace loving people, and they believe that the best way of assuring peace is to be prepared for war...it is exactly the same

³⁵⁵ Major Oliver Stewart, "Motor-Cannon Aeroplane," *Saturday Review*, July 27, 1935, p. 938.

attitude of the bulk of the population in this country in spite of what Mr. MacDonald and his followers say.”³⁵⁶ It was not a black mark on Germany for taking this route, but a black mark on Britain for not doing the same and then some. But, it was the bombers that were the most important to Grey. Fighters were chiefly defensive weapons to intercept bombers. But, as Baldwin had said, “the bomber will always get through.” The only way to achieve deterrence through strength, said Grey, was to focus on offensive weapons—and to make those technically superior. The British Empire was simply too big to try to defend its vast spaces with fighter aircraft: “The safety of the British Empire, especially of those Dominions in which the white population is too small to allow them to maintain adequate air forces of their own, depends upon our production of the best war machines...The whole British Empire can be protected by Imperial Air Power...but, it cannot be protected against attacks every here and there.”³⁵⁷ Instead, said Rothermere, “we must be in a position to be able to say to any country which wants to attack us, ‘You dare, and we shall come obliterate you.’”³⁵⁸

The Blackshirt, in its R.A.F. Pageant number from 1933, declared that fascism and air armaments together were a formula for peace. The two shared much in common, especially their modern character, although both had been associated with war. This was simply a misunderstanding, it said.

Aviation, like Fascism, has to deal with opposition and misrepresentation. In some cases this is open, but more often it is concealed. Both Fascism and aviation are accused of being prejudicial to international harmony, of being short cuts to war and deadly symptoms of a reactionary nationalism. In actual fact Fascism and aviation are natural

³⁵⁶ C. G. Grey, “Hitler’s Influence,” *the Aeroplane*, May 24, 1933, p. 921.

³⁵⁷ C. G. Grey, “Protecting the Empire,” *The Aeroplane*, April 25, 1934, p. 718.

³⁵⁸ Lord Rothermere, quoted in “The National League of Airmen,” *Action*, November 28, 1936, p. 10.

responses of human enterprise and intelligence to the needs of modern civilization; they exist because they meet the needs of the present and offer security for the future.³⁵⁹

The *Blackshirt* also supported another kind of bombing in the British Empire. The same article applauded the effectiveness of the bomber in managing the Empire's subject peoples. Under the seemingly negative sub-heading "Bombing Villages," the article went on to speak of it in relatively positive terms: "Modern science and development in aviation has now made possible the method of maintaining order by the bombing of rebel villages from the air, and very effective that method has proved. Warning for the villages to be evacuated before the bombing is invariably given, and the enemies of this country have never yet been able to prove a single case of woman or child being hurt."³⁶⁰ The BUF, here, was commenting on an item that had been in the news in 1932. The R.A.F. had supported bombing within the Empire out of a fear that abolishing it and limiting bomber production would threaten the very existence of the R.A.F. Lord Londonderry therefore "dutifully" carried his message to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva that year, insisting "that bombing villages in the Middle East was an essential, indeed a beneficent, measure of police."³⁶¹ This raised a good deal of anger among opponents of the Government, but it was apparently a policy the BUF and other members of the extreme right supported whole heartedly.

The early phase of Lady Houston's campaign in her *Saturday Review* had no such confidence in peace – especially peace with Germany (she would later warm up to the Nazi state). Britain's air deficiency struck her as the nation's most dire crisis and the pages of her periodical were filled with denunciations of the Government for allowing the situation to continue. Britain's air

³⁵⁹ "Fascist Aviation Makes for Peace," *The Blackshirt*, July 1, 1933, p.1.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁶¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 365.

defense and the blame for its condition were the central focus of the *Saturday Review* from the late 1920's until her death in 1936. It was also more obnoxious than other publications. Lady Houston consistently insulted Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin, Lord Londonderry, and Anthony Eden ("that Serpent Eden" he was routinely called). This was carried on to the point of the Government banning the paper for two weeks in 1933 because she had publicly denounced MacDonald's war record. This would appear to have had a lasting effect on its circulation as thereafter there were regularly small advertisements instructing readers how to obtain the *Saturday Review*, if their newsstand wouldn't sell it. As early as 1926 the *Saturday Review* bemoaned the high spending on the Navy at the neglect of the air, angry at the Government's inability to see the future clearly. "Is it either rational or necessary," said the editors, "that we should be spending over three times as much on the Navy and over twice as much on the Army as on the Air Force? Which of these is likely to be the determining arm of the future?" Once expenditures were to be directed to air production, like Grey, Houston and her followers believed in the strategy of offensive capability (bombing) as a deterrent. In 1933 the editors wrote:

To us the air matters pre-eminently, just as the sea did and does. That is the price that must be paid for being an island. We are that much more vulnerable and our imperial commitments, increasing the range of our essential activities, weaken still further our apparent strengths. It may be true that an effective air defense of England is not feasible. But is that reason for shedding the true defense—our power to attack? Once upon a time it was reasonable to trust in our capacity to improvise fighting services at the last moment. Today that trust is gone and in the air, whence sudden typhoons may blow, it has no excuse whatever for its entertainment. There are tragic dangers in the most perfectly balanced budget.³⁶²

The campaign came to a head in the winter of 1933/34, as Lady Houston offered to give the Government the money for a London Air Defense program out of her own pocket. This, of course, "exposed" the Government as unable to accomplish the task itself, and the offer was

³⁶² Editors' Comments, *Saturday Review*, March 18, 1933, p. 252.

quietly dismissed. MacDonald, especially, would have nothing to do with it for the obvious reason that Houston had repeatedly and publicly attacked him. With the Government's refusal, Lady Houston placed a huge sign outside the yacht upon which she lived that read, "Down with MacDonald the Traitor!" She then sent a personal telegram to MacDonald that read, "I alone have dared to point out the dire need for air defense of London. You have muzzled others who have deplored this shameful neglect. You have treated my patriotic gesture with a contempt such as no other Government would have been guilty of toward a patriot." The *Saturday Review* made a great deal of her great offer, the continuing need for defense, and MacDonald's supposedly arrogant refusal. In January of 1934, she published a large-print message to "Ye Citizens of London," on the magazine's cover. It read as follows:

Londoners, You are citizens of no mean city and yet – the London we love and are so proud of, is the only Capital without any Defense against an invasion from the Air!

Do you realize what this means? It means that your homes and your children could be destroyed in a few hours. Are you content – IN ORDER TO PLEASE THE PRIME MINISTER—to remain in this deadly peril?

The finest machines and bravest airmen are eagerly waiting to be employed to protect you. Do you want this protection? I am told it will cost two hundred thousand pounds, and I will gladly give this sum to save London and its inhabitants from this terrible danger – as a Christmas present to my Country.

The Government will do nothing unless YOU tell them THEY MUST accept my offer.

Your True Friend, Lucy Houston³⁶³

Despite the Government's persistent refusal, some, like her biographer Wentworth Day, see her funding of Britain's other air programs as crucial. Her involvement, he suggests, in buttressing Britain's competitive air racing and in pushing the envelope of high altitude flying (the Everest flights, see Chapter 6) made her a vital component of Britain's eventual victory in the air. He

³⁶³ *Saturday Review*, January 1, 1934, p. 1.

goes as far as to subtitle his book, “the Woman who Won the War.” This is a tremendous exaggeration, but her material contributions were clearly meaningful to the air community. Whether her dogmatic and abusive treatment of Britain’s politicians had any genuinely beneficial effect is much less certain.

Rothermere’s campaign was a bit less personally antagonistic, but still quite abrasive. We have already seen some of the Rothermere vitriol regarding the policy of disarmament. But, as that policy affected Britain’s air strength he was even more focused in his attacks. Rothermere routinely included alarmist stories with headlines like, “Britain a Weakling in the Air!” and “The Coming Air War!” His campaign was launched in autumn of 1933 with the full page editorial titled “Disarmament Means War.” It carried on with its next installment as another full page editorial titled “We Need 5,000 War-Planes!” The print was accompanied by an illustration of a great plane leading a line of continually smaller planes. The largest plane read “France, 3,000 planes,” the next, “United States, 2,826 planes.” Japan and Italy followed, and then a fifth and last plane, which was quite tiny. This plane had a flag to the side that read “Great Britain 1,434 planes.” The editorial said:

In the most vital of all departments of our national defense the Government is gravely neglecting its duty...Of all the Great Powers we are the weakest in the air. There is a short-sighted, Geneva-doped section of public opinion in this country which finds great satisfaction in such a state of affairs. To their perverted minds there appears to be a virtue in defenselessness, though they would be the first to be seized with hysterical panic if we ever had to pay the natural penalty of the risks we are so rashly running. I say that our present policy in aerial policy is a policy of suicide...the time has come for us to pay heed to our own peril and to meet it by creating without delay the most powerful Air Force in Europe. We can raise our aerial strength to 5,000 machines for less than the cost of three such huge and dubiously valuable battleships as the Lord Nelson. Our aircraft industry, a vital element of the nation’s trade and transportation, would receive a much needed impetus from increased construction.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Lord Rothermere, “We Need 5,000 War-Planes!” *Daily Mail*, November 7, 1933, p. 5.

In the third editorial spread titled, “What the Next War Will Be Like,” he addressed the difficulties of getting the message through to the public. But, once the public was convinced and pressure was transferred onto the Government through general opinion, the construction of a modern fleet could be speedily accomplished. The trouble with reaching the public on the issue was that “the British public’s indifference to its danger is due to the fact that it regards national defense as a technical question which may safely be left to military experts.” Sadly, said Rothermere by quoting Fuller, most military men “know no more about the science of war than a chimpanzee knows about the science of dynamics.” Still, this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue as “Modern scientific invention moves at such a pace that military practice needs to be constantly transformed in order to keep up.” The good news, he said, was that “of all instruments of war, aeroplanes are the easiest to manufacture swiftly and secretly. They can be turned out in series as simply as motor cars. If one single works in Detroit has produced 20,000 motor cars a week, there is nothing to prevent any highly industrialized country from bringing a huge air fleet into existence before the rest of the world has any inkling of it.”³⁶⁵

In his next edition of the campaign, he wrote again of the need for air modernization and focused his attacks on the Government and their inertia. But, this time he was responding to the Government’s agreement to build new aircraft. Unfortunately, he said, they were offering only a token political gesture rather than a meaningful building program. Rothermere does not go as far as to explicitly condemn the entire democratic system. He comes close, however, by ridiculing those politicians in Westminster who could not grasp the nation’s most burning priority. It was against the anti-modernity of the “inert old men who control our national affairs,” that he vented

³⁶⁵Lord Rothermere, “What the Next War Will be Like,” *Daily Mail*, November 14, 1933.

his spleen. He concludes with the very serious charge of their culpability if the nation should be attacked by air.

There is no augury so bad for Britain's future as the fact that her politicians ever since the war have failed to realize that we have entered into a new Age of Air Power...No less alarming than past neglect of air defense is the trumpery reparation of it proposed by the present Government. Roused at last to action by the pressure of public opinion, they have announced their intention of building the ten squadrons of which we are short on the admitted needs of a decade ago. The farcical inadequacy of this proposal is positive proof of the incapacity of the old men who rule our country, and of those who, at head of the Army and Navy, keep the clutch of the dead hand of tradition tight upon the allotment of Service expenditure. Their brains are ossified. They cannot grasp the fact that the whole basis of national defense has changed. These medievalists still cling to their twenty two regiments of cavalry, armed with lance and sabre, and their long columns of horse and mule transport that a few gas-bombs would reduce to carrion...While we cling to the standards of a day gone by, other nations are adapting themselves to the new conditions...If the tension that is gathering in Europe leads to conflict before this process is completed, the men responsible for the paltriness of the nation's air resources will be guilty of the greatest betrayal in British history.³⁶⁶

The BU F, not surprisingly, connected the failure to keep pace with air armaments directly to the "out-of-date" democratic system. While Rothermere had leveled his criticism at politicians in general (though sometimes personally mentioning MacDonald or Londonderry), he had not engaged in explicitly personal attacks as Lady Houston had done. Nor had he called for the dissolution of democracy. The BUF was, of course, a different matter. In 1936 *Action* ran a front page spread on the perceived scandal at the Air Ministry. The banner sized headline read, "Britain Defenseless!" The article that followed recounted the recent offer by Lord Nuffield to place his Cowley (Oxfordshire) assembly line facility at the disposal of the Government for purposes of aircraft production. Nuffield had been rebuffed by the new Air Minister, Lord Swinton, and proceeded to make a public statement detailing the rejection. Nuffield being an old supporter of Mosley's movement, it is not surprising that the BUF press would rush to his defense and seize the opportunity to insult the Government. The thrust of the piece, written by

³⁶⁶ Lord Rothermere, *Daily Mail*, reprinted in My Fight to Rearm Britain, pp. 61-62.

Dorman (“Blackbird”), was the comparison between the background and achievements of the two men and the corrupt nature of aircraft contracts under the present Government. Swinton, said Dorman, “knew not the first thing about aviation. He knew nothing whatever about the leading men in the industry and in the Air Force...Before he was Air Minister he was never even remotely connected with the aircraft or engineering industry.” Meanwhile, Nuffield was “one of the greatest experts in the mass production of internal combustion engines in this country and should be among the first to whom those responsible for our air defenses would turn for advice and cooperation.”³⁶⁷ But, it should have come as no surprise that Swinton turned away such a highly qualified outsider. There was a closed society, said Dorman, run under the auspices of the Society of British Aircraft Constructors (SBAC). It was not a publicly recognized ring, but “a typical democratic institution composed of representatives of each main constructing firm,” and run by “a Chairman who is elected yearly and the usual host of paid and unpaid officials.” Anyone outside the privileged circle was kept out by the Society, which protected its own connections for government contracts. What was worse, the scheme it had put together for the actual construction of planes in Britain’s new rearmament plan, was based on “shadow” production. Dorman explained that a single firm would receive a contract, but then distribute actual parts construction to a variety of firms. Then these parts would be assembled into a finished plane at a central master factory. Dorman said,

We found, during the War, that there are several miles an hour difference in speed between the identical design made by different factories. What was a thoroughly good aeroplane when built by one firm was bad and dangerous when built by another. It might be too weak, too heavy, or out of balance in some way. Exactly the same thing was the case with engines. What therefore will happen when the various bits and pieces of

³⁶⁷ Geoffrey Dorman, “Britain Defenseless!” *Action*, October 31, 1936, p. 1.

engines are built in different factories to an even greater extent than was done in the war, and then are assembled in still another factory?³⁶⁸

Furthermore, the Government's plan called for these factories to be temporary. After the scheme was complete, "the factories are going to be closed down and the machines greased for preservation. What is to happen to the workers who have become skilled at their jobs, and workers for these jobs are very hard to train?...when a national emergency again arrives we shall find ourselves with closed factories, equipped only for making obsolete aeroplanes and engines, with no staff to man them." This was a perfectly representative scenario under democracy, according to Dorman. All of it could have been avoided with the dissolution of SBAC and placing an aircraft production expert at the head of the Air Ministry. But, he lamented "Democracy will never do this...Now we witness the doubtful spectacle of Democracy trying to save its face. Political trickery is more important than is the safety of the country."³⁶⁹

Rothermere, meanwhile, eventually decided to go farther than a press campaign. Exasperated with attempting to affect legislation or convince the public through the newspaper, he formed his own organization for the promotion of the air. This was the "National League of Airmen," which was operating as a pressure group by the national election of 1935. He announced his formation of this group by writing his own letter to the Editor of the *Daily Mail*. In it, he described his rationale for creating the League.

In two years Germany has become the greatest air power in the world. The reason is not far to seek. Of the four men who control the destinies of Germany – Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, and Hess – two of them, Goering and Hess were air aces during the Great War, Goering emerging from the war with a world reputation. What is the position here? Unquestionably the people of Britain are relatively less air-minded than they were more than twenty years ago. During the war we produced peerless airmen...How were they rewarded? Today...there is not one single practical, up-to-date pilot in any position of

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

real authority at the Air Ministry. How is this kind of thing to be remedied?...This can be achieved only by the organization of a new League which shall be an arsenal of facts and information for circulation throughout the country...it must be a League entirely directed by airmen. It must not be a hotch-potch of civilians with a few airmen who are unable to make their influences felt. The only full members of the National League of Airmen must be pilots, not over 40 years of age, or pilots who can prove they had ACTUAL flying service during the war...These speakers will not only enlighten the people of this country upon the precarious position in which they stand, but will rigidly scrutinize and, if need be, correct all official statements about Britain's air strength and progress.³⁷⁰

Rothermere's League was headed up by Norman Macmillan and Montague Smith, both noted airmen and oft-quoted far right air advocates. Their League had seven clearly articulated objectives:

The creation and maintenance of an Air Force equal in size and equipment to that of any other Power.

Increase and modernization of the Fleet Air Arm to a strength greater than that of any other world Power.

Full encouragement and assistance to commercial and civil aviation in Great Britain and the Empire.

Abolition of the petrol tax of 8d. a gallon on aviation fuel.

Provision of greater facilities for general flying and civil training.

Additional Auxiliary Air Force Squadrons

The creation of a Ministry of Defense to correlate the three defense Services, ensuring for the Air Arm its proper place in the defense of Britain and the Empire.³⁷¹

It is difficult to measure the impact of the League as it traveled and lectured during the 1935 election. Certainly air rearmament began to pick up after 1936, but this was more directly associated with the immediate crises of the Abyssinian invasion and Hitler's expansion. Another question about the impact of the National League of Airmen is the role it played in creating a reservoir of flying talent leading up to the Second World War. That Britain's aircraft industry was able to achieve miracles by 1940 is beyond question (though it has not been carefully treated in a specialized study). But, an unanswered question exists as to how Britain produced so many

³⁷⁰ Rothermere, reprinted in My Fight to Rearm Britain, pp. 90-91.

³⁷¹ Charter of the National League of Airmen, quoted in Rothermere, My Fight to Rearm Britain, P. 94.

capable pilots in such a short time. How much the National League of Airmen contributed to this relative to the more official Air Training Corps has not yet been established. It seems logical that Rothermere's League may have made an important contribution but, a specific study to prove this through quantification remains to be done.

In addition to forming the National League of Airmen, Rothermere went beyond print and founding an organization to direct involvement in the development of air technology. He decided in 1934 to sponsor the construction of a military bomber aircraft that he intended to be the most effective in the world. He explained in My Fight to Rearm Britain, that "it was impossible for me to put myself forward as the advocate of "air-mindedness" and adequate aerial defense forces without gathering about me many skilled technicians who shared my views, and steeping myself in the technical literature of flying."³⁷² His conclusion, after this period of investigation, was that Britain's technical community was loaded with talent and potential, but not adequately supported by "official aid and finance." Air firms had extreme difficulties in getting financial backing for experimental models which could push the bounds of "extreme performance." Secondly, his air contacts said that government work was so encumbered with red tape that rapid and nimble development was impossible. As he wrote, "orders from the Air Ministry for new designs of military machines stipulated so many requirements that it sometimes took years to satisfy them, and before the final approval was given other countries had evolved better machines."³⁷³ In view of this, he invited representatives from the major aircraft firms to a conference at which he outlined his plans for a bombing plane and promised to keep the design and production parameters as efficient as possible. The Bristol Aeroplane Company accepted the

³⁷² Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 100.

terms, Rothermere actually funding design and early production. It should be noted, however, that Bristol did not design a new project specifically for Rothermere, but offered a model which was already in the design stages. During testing runs, Rothermere relates, he was begged by an unspecified military man to put an end to the quest for top speeds. It was simply too dangerous. Rothermere used this incident to once again re-iterate his frustration with the anti-modern tendencies of the nation's government types.

Towards the end of its construction I had a curious example of how the official mind works. A very celebrated and gallant soldier, who had had much to do with aircraft in the last war, approached me with perturbation, after hearing from me of the projected machine. He pleaded with me not to allow it to be flown. At such a landing speed, he said, it would crash and kill its pilot. I should be a moral murderer. His attitude was exactly that of those gentlemen who declared in Victoria's day that locomotives which went beyond coaching speed were doomed to disaster. I did not listen to his gloomy forebodings...³⁷⁴

The result was a high speed bomber, the Type 142 with two Mercury engines. It reached an incredible top speed of 307 mph (though this is controversial, 285 mph being the more accepted figure with full load). The finished product was christened by Rothermere: The "Britain First." It was an uncomfortable name. As we have seen, Rothermere formally broke off ties with Mosley and the BUF in the summer of 1934 (by which time he had already ordered the aircraft). But, "Britain First," was at the time, the most prominent slogan of the BUF. The back of almost any BUF book or campaign pamphlet, as well as the banner of its newspaper, included the circle and flash symbol with the words "Britain First." Despite his formal break he clearly retained his affinities for some of the BUF's convictions. Was this perhaps a gesture to Mosley to say that although he could no longer be publicly associated, he was with him in spirit? We shall never know for sure, unless some written source from Rothermere is released that can shed light on it.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

The plane eventually saw three more design upgrades and a change of name to the Bristol Blenheim I (for 1937 orders), and the Bristol Blenheim Mark IV for 1939. The Blenheim bomber was one of Britain's most effective aircraft during the war, used extensively in the Middle East and Far Eastern theaters.³⁷⁵ It would eventually see several more design editions and, because of its lightness and mobility, even be converted to fighter work.

Besides Rothermere, other members of the far right were intimately involved with Britain's air defense program as well, like J. A. Chamier. He was called upon to run the Air Defense Cadet Corps in 1938, which would also include Sir Malcolm Campbell on its organizing board. In terms of the actual planes, as we have seen, the Mosquito and Hurricane fighters were begun under Lord Londonderry's Ministry as well as the early development of radar. Additionally, Rothermere's bomber was not the only aircraft raining bombs on the enemy during the Second World War. A. V. Roe's company Avro Aircraft, though by now it had moved from his control, produced the "Lancaster" which was another of Britain's crucial bombing planes. The Lancaster was a heavy bomber able to accommodate enormous bomb-loads while still remaining quite maneuverable. Avro Lancasters of several models flew some 156,000 sorties during the war and dropped 609,000 tons of bombs. It is a strange and uneasy irony that some of Britain's far right fascist sympathizers played leading roles in creating the technologies and personnel that would in fact *save* Britain from fascism.

Were Extreme Right Fears Justified?

Was the extreme right obsession with Britain's lagging position in national defense justified? Was Britain genuinely miles behind its rivals in terms of technology, organization, and materiel? A great volume of historical opinion since the Second World War has agreed that Britain's

³⁷⁵ For a full history of the development of the Blenheim and complete technical specifications, see G. Warner, [The Bristol Blenheim: A Complete History](#) (London: Crecy Publishing, 2005).

position was indeed quite precarious. This interpretation is particularly emphasized by those analyzing Britain's 20th century decline in both industrial and political power. But, as discussed in the Introduction, the declinist school is laboring to explain a disastrous decline that did not really take place. Recently, a new view of Britain's defense complex during the interwar years has forced us to reconsider the issue. David Edgerton argues that Britain's forces were in fact among the strongest on earth at the time and its scientists and technological community were well mobilized to that end.³⁷⁶ The miraculous accomplishments of Beaverbrook's Ministry of Air Production, for instance, could never have been achieved unless the air industry was already in an immensely powerful position, including highly modernized production and management. In terms of defense expenditure, when adjusted for inflation, Britain's "interwar defense expenditure was significantly higher than in the 1890's, and only just below the figures for 1905 and 1910. Their figures also suggested stability in defense expenditure between 1924 and 1934. That expenditure was broadly at the same level just before the Great War."³⁷⁷ The relative position of Britain's defense spending changed in the early 1930's only because of the significant increases by Germany and the Soviet Union. To put it simply, the liberal-democratic Governments of the interwar years did not disarm. Extreme right wing criticisms were incorrect on that score. Furthermore, the far right "experts" were advocating specific technologies that would have been of little use in the coming conflict. The British Navy was busy building five air craft carriers, during the 1930's, which would prove to be the decisive naval weapon of the war. But, there is no meaningful discussion of the value of air craft carriers in contemporary pro-fascist discourse. The British Government was also sinking significant resources into the

³⁷⁶ See David Edgerton, Warfare State: Britain 1920-1970. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

development of radar by 1935, a project at the cutting edge of high technology. While Lady Houston and Lord Rothermere practically accused the liberal Governments of treason for their neglect of air defenses, those Governments were secretly constructing the most successful air defense system of the entire war.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“AN INSULATED BRITAIN”

The Extreme Right, Technological Modernity and Exclusive Nationalism

Defining any broad political movement in general terms is problematic. Defining fascism, for instance, has proven extremely difficult to hammer out between scholars. Older notions that saw fascism as essentially a rejection of modernity or violently reactionary capitalism have not survived. Today there are theories of fascism that range from seeing it as predominantly left-wing, predominantly right-wing, neither right nor left, predominantly modern and revolutionary, and those that see it as changing its character over time. There are also scholars who see a generic fascism as an entirely artificial concept. The debate surrounding the “essence” of fascism or the “anatomy” of fascism is extremely complex and variegated and does not appear to be approaching a settled consensus.

Britain’s extreme right was highly complex as well. As has been mentioned previously there were branches which longed for a fascist dictatorship in Britain and those who did not. There were those who clung to the Italian variety and those who sympathized more with Nazi Germany. There were also many on the extreme right whose views changed over time. Even so, there does appear to be a crucial and consistent thread in the objectives and convictions among the varieties of extreme right organizations and notables; a common denominator, so to speak. This consistency lies in their pursuit of what I call “exclusive nationalism,” though I do not claim to have coined the term. Their fervent belief in exclusive nationalism took form in several different expressions that might seem otherwise separate. The passionate appeal for rearmament and a modernized military was positioned not for aggression, but for making Britain and its

Empire safe from attackers. The disgust with collective security expressed the far right's belief that Britain had to take control of her own destiny, separate from entanglement with other nations. Economically, those on the extreme right were almost universally in favor of protection and structured imperial trade that legally excluded competitors. Racial and anti-Semitic xenophobia was another expression of this kind of exclusive nationalism. At least some on the extreme right, if not the majority, were adamant about keeping Britain for the British, and were highly critical of the Jews who they saw as forming a "nation within a nation." All of these aspects of the extreme right program are related and fit into their broader ideology of withdrawal, isolation, and insulation.

The various expressions of exclusive nationalism, which will be examined below, constituted the most cherished objectives of the extreme right. The reason that they are so important for this study is that they were all connected closely to the extreme right's faith in technological modernity. It was science, technology, and industry which would provide the means for accomplishing their most urgent priorities. Technology, especially communications and transport, could be used to consolidate the Empire into a unified entity, preserving its peoples and resources for British benefit. Modern military technologies could make aggression against Britain too risky for any power to attempt. These included defensive technologies like fighters, ships, and radar, but they also included technologies of aggression like the larger bombers. Self-sufficiency in raw materials could be achieved through the scientific development of agriculture and through techno-scientific innovations like those processes that could extract oil from coal. The close connection of technological modernity to their most cherished objectives helps to make more visible the predominantly modern character of Britain's extreme right. Furthermore, that preoccupation with their own isolationism as well as their admiration for the radical levels of

insulation in Italy and Germany may help us to see exclusive nationalism as an underemphasized but essential ingredient in fascism more generally.

Consolidating the Empire: “Making One Great Family”

High on the list of far right priorities was the preservation and development of Britain’s Empire. Imperialists, however, were losing popularity nationwide, and during the interwar period Britain began the process of decolonization. The British extreme right was particularly upset at the moves giving India and Egypt increased levels of autonomy during the 1930’s. A great deal has been written about extreme right (and especially BUF) protests against decolonization. But, the alternative vision that British fascists and pro-fascists called for has been less well defined by historians. In fact, the imperial vision so near and dear to their hearts was dependent upon the progress of technology. It was the cutting edge new technologies in areas like shipbuilding, air travel, radio communications, and defense, they felt, which could allow Britain to consolidate the Empire into a far more unified whole. This agenda was often made explicit in their writing, and it operated on two levels. First, there was the more obvious role of technology in functionally performing the tasks that would bind the Empire together. Second, was the more subtle role of technology in psychologically awing the “backward” imperial populations. The power of technology to be an agent of persuasion has been a recurring theme in this thesis. As we have seen, the visual impact of heroic feats and high technology made significant impressions on British observers in the fascist nations. Along these lines, then, some on the far right pointed to the potential for technology to so impress and overwhelm the less industrialized peoples, that any thoughts of their own human equality (which would inspire independence) would be dashed.

Radio communications provided one way to make the Empire a seamless unit. While Britain had used submarine cable networks for decades to administer its overseas territories, this still

took time. As effective as telegrams were, they could not compare to the ability of wireless radio to speak to the entire world in “real time.” “Bluebird” wrote a column on the imperial benefits of radio in *Action* in 1937. The story included coverage of the King’s Christmas radio address and discussed its impact. The article ran under the headline, “The Empire and Radio, Making one Great Family,” and in it he articulated the prospects of a new imperial era made possible through wireless:

The invention of short wave radio telephony, which is daily improving in technique, is in its own way doing as much to knit the Empire more closely together as is the aeroplane. Nowadays on great occasions the monarch is able by means of radio telephony to speak to the whole of his people all over the Empire at the same time. King George V, in the penultimate Christmas broadcast of his life, speaking to the Empire, referred to his people as “this great family.” Until that moment, it had not really dawned on people what a great service radio could mean in the cementing together of all the outlying portions of the Empire. On that day, in a programme which was relayed all over the world, people spoke from Canada, India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India, Ireland, England and every other part of the Empire. It stirred the imagination of all, and after it was over reports came in from all over the world saying that in almost every case reception of the whole programme had been splendid.³⁷⁸

As usual, the article also included a jab at the BBC and the government’s failure to be at the leading edge of technology. He made the point that it was amateur radio operators who had figured out the effectiveness of “short wave” frequencies to broadcast great distances and to pick up signals from across the globe. Other nations (like Italy and Germany), had grasped this early, while Britain’s government had again lagged behind. After the potential of short waves was discovered, “all over the world money was spent in investigating the possibilities of this. Germany, France, and America built successful medium-powered transmitting stations on these low wave-lengths and established regular broadcasting services to outlying territories.” In Britain’s case it was only “long after everybody else had been successful, our own BBC

³⁷⁸ “Bluebird,” “The Empire and Radio: Making one Great Family,” *Action*, May 15, 1937, p.4.

grudgingly erected stations at Daventry with which to carry on short wave broadcasting to the Empire. These were more or less successful, but in technical matters they were a long way behind the Germans, French, Italians, and Americans.”³⁷⁹

Air travel offered another powerful way in which to bind the Empire into a cohesive entity. The *Daily Mail* was a regular advocate of increased air service around the Empire for passengers, cargo, and the mails. Britain’s Imperial Airways held the monopoly for Empire air routes and the mail contracts, but was expanding very slowly. In order to develop these more swiftly the *Daily Mail* routinely insisted that the charges for air mails should be reduced. In 1933 the paper ran an anonymously authored article under the headline, “Big Air Fleets to Link the Empire – New and Faster Routes – Mails too Dear.” The author, either Rothermere himself or someone articulating his agenda, said “The importance of linking together the British Empire by airways has been constantly stressed by the *Daily Mail*. It is essential that through our air services, both in transport and in defense, we resume our pride of place in the world.” Imperial Airways’ Empire system was a fine way to forge ahead with this as “the policy of the board...has been to create an airliner service connecting the various parts of the Empire with each other and ultimately with the rest of the world.” The problem was that some parts of the government did not recognize the importance of this project and were holding up its growth through misguided policies. The post office was the worst offender. Air mail services through the Empire were key to the far right vision of a uniting the Empire into a single, coherent unit. But, according to Sir Eric Geddes, the head of Imperial Airways, the post office was levying high fees for air mail which held back its expansion.

‘The mails,’ said Sir Eric, ‘carried through the whole of our services showed an increase of 28 per cent. over the previous year. The growth of this class of traffic is, however,

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p.4.

seriously hampered by the policy of our own Post Office and other administrations. But there are signs of postal authorities realizing that the air mail services are being accepted by the public as a normal means of conveyance and that it will soon demand that a first class correspondence shall not be segregated for special treatment and fees.³⁸⁰

So, as was routine in far right writing, the article criticized the government for its inability to see the future and enable its arrival through technological advance. Instead, their blindness in technical matters often resulted in placing obstacles in the way of just those areas that were vital to Britain's re-emergence. The public meanwhile could see the obvious and, they believed, would eventually force the government to face reality.

The power of the air plane to cement the Empire into a coherent whole was avidly endorsed by the air correspondent Oliver Stewart as well. Stewart laid out his opinions on the subject in the pages of the *Saturday Review* in an article titled "An Empire Air Programme." In it he urged Britain to take advantage of the new opportunities of high speed air traffic and to develop them. He called for mail to be shifted to 200 m.p.h. aircraft and "the frequency of service should be increased immediately to one service a day." The reasoning underlying such an agenda was again to construct a single imperial entity large, strong, rich, and powerful enough to compete on the increasingly difficult world stage. Stewart crystallized the extreme right position on this point in words that got to the heart of technology's place in Britain's imperialism; and again expressed the general frustration with the Government for lacking the vision to employ aviation in such a way.

Personnel, machines and ground organization could all be provided quickly if only the Government decided to use *the aeroplane as an instrument of Empire*. If a sound system of mail carrying were established, a sound system of passenger carrying would not be long delayed... Aviation should be regarded, not as a little business on its own, but as an instrument of Empire, for achieving consolidation and concord. By increasing the speed of communication between the parts, it can make the whole stronger and more efficient. The establishment of frequent and really fast air mail services on the two already

³⁸⁰ "Big Air Fleets to Link the Empire," *Daily Mail*, October 31, 1933, p. 5.

pioneered Empire routes to Australia and to South Africa is the most urgent need in British civil aviation today.³⁸¹

The emphasis on “one great family” and harmony amongst the peoples of the Empire – all facilitated by modern technologies – seems a rather contradictory vision for the far right. Especially for the explicitly fascist wing, gross racial prejudice and anti-Semitism would not seem to mix with such utopian visions. Attitudes about race varied a great deal, at least in public, within the extreme right community. Leese’s IFL and other radically fascist organizations like the Britons, the Nordic League, and the Link, for instance, were essentially founded on ideas of racial purity and anti-alienism. The BUF stance was often inconsistent and changed over time. To clarify it, we must take a brief diversion into the BUF’s race discourse. As Mosley assembled the party he announced that it would not be in any way anti-Semitic or racialist, on the Nazi model. His was to be a non-racist version of fascism. This outraged people like Leese, who accused the BUF of being “Kosher fascists.” Even so, many members of the BUF who took on important roles as public speakers and propagandists, were quite overtly racist. These included men like William Joyce, A. K. Chesterton, and the East End speaker, Mick Clarke. So even before 1934, anti-Semitism showed its face. After extended contests with Jewish groups and the Marxist left, and also probably as a result of rapidly falling popularity, Mosley made the calculated decision to change the BUF’s policy. This decision appears to have been taken in late 1934. During that summer, the Night of the Long Knives took place in Germany, Lord Rothermere removed the official support of his newspaper, and the violence of the Olympia meeting hit the press. The combination of all these things sent the BUF membership tumbling and the party soon found itself in dire financial straits. It is against that background that scholars, like Skidelsky, have identified the BUF’s shift to overt racism and

³⁸¹ Oliver Stewart, “An Empire Air Programme,” *Saturday Review*, May 5, 1934, p. 508.

anti-Semitism as a calculated move more to do with (misguided) political opportunism than with serious racial convictions on Mosley's part.³⁸² The BUF press became disgracefully anti-Semitic under the editorship of Chesterton and Joyce, featuring regular columns like "The Jews Again," and "Jolly Judah." From 1935 until its demise, the BUF press blamed nearly every world problem on Jews and Jewish finance, including that paradoxical and idiotic insistence that Jews were in control of both finance capitalism and communism. Although these systems were diametrically opposed, their twisted belief was that Jews of these opposing schools were working together to produce chaos, out of which would emerge Jewish world domination. During the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the debate on British sanctions, the BUF press ran articles deriding Africans as uncivilized savages, slavers, and using terms like "Buck Nigger," for the Emperor, Haile Sailasse. These were accompanied by photos of Africans with their limbs hacked off, in order to reinforce the barbarism of Abyssinians. In one instance the Emperor was even accused of being a Jew. Under a photo of a crest-fallen Haile Sailasse, Chesterton ran the caption, "the Lion of Judah!" (This connection lay in the Biblical story of the Queen of Sheba who is said to have come from the region of Ethiopia, where there remains a small Jewish community).

The tendency, then, of some scholars, like Robert Skidelsky, to under-represent the level of racism in the BUF is mistaken. The protests of Mosley, later in his life, denying any genuine anti-Semitism could possibly reflect his own beliefs, but certainly the overwhelming message of his party from 1935 until 1940 was a stridently racist one. Furthermore, after 1936 the BUF increasingly adopted Nazism as a model and appealed to British pro-Nazis. By 1938, Mosley was calling for Jews to have their citizenship removed for acting against the interest of the

³⁸² See for example, Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p 381.

nation. What exactly constituted this was not made clear, but presumably he meant investing in competing industries abroad. Other members of the far right rarely expressed overtly racist opinions in public or in print. Their personal correspondence is regularly peppered with references to racial hatred, but in terms of materials that would publicly outline their political agenda, race was mostly sidestepped.³⁸³

With that said, however, the BUF had a simply stated policy on race that it included in campaign materials, its press and in Mosley's books. As he said in a speech from 1934, "we will never have persecution on racial or religious grounds...our Empire is composed of numerous races...bound together in a tight unity; and any suggestion of racial or religious discrimination strikes a blow at the conception of the British Empire."³⁸⁴ In the campaign for Imperial unity, this tack was the most useful. As a result, in writing about the dream of imperial consolidation, far right authors presented technology as enabling harmony between the imperial populations. Dorman wrote an article with this twist with the headline, "Aviation and the Empire: We are now closer neighbors." His particular emphasis was the potential of passenger, cargo and airmail services to reduce separation between imperial peoples.

Rudyard Kipling wrote "transportation is civilization." By that he meant that by finding the means to travel between one land and another the people of those lands were enabled to get to know one another better, and therefore to understand one another. We may dislike certain foreign people in the abstract, but as a general rule, when we meet them we find that they are in most cases very much like ourselves. The coming of the aeroplane has altered the time-distance factor to such an extent that at this present moment no point on the earth need be distant more than three or four days from any other

³⁸³ Though rarely being overt in published material, C. G. Grey expressed his racialism and even his hatred of the French and the Americans in his letters to Luttmann-Johnson, See Luttmann-Johnson papers HLJI-43. Likewise, Sir Barry Domville expressed his rabid anti-Semitism to his diary, referring to one public speaker as a "dirty little Jew," and routinely blaming them for his hard times after the War, Domville Diaries DM/ 56.

³⁸⁴ Oswald Mosley, Speech from Albert Hall Meeting of October, 1934, quoted in Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), p. 338.

point. I have no hesitation in saying that, within the next few years, no point on the earth's surface will be distant more than one day's travelling from any other point...When one remembers that even nowadays it takes forty days to reach Sydney and Melbourne by boat, and seventeen days to reach Cape Town, the saving in time is remarkable. Instead of regarding one another as people who come from the ends of the earth, our fellow citizens in the Empire can regard themselves almost as next-door neighbors. Understanding will be greater, trade will improve, and the Empire will become a much more closely knit community.³⁸⁵

It should be said that Dorman only mentions Australia and South Africa specifically. It seems clear from his nebulous language and from the context of the rest of the British fascist press that Dorman was talking about the community of white Empire-citizens. In far right discourse it was rather taken for granted that Indians, Asians and Africans were not to be equals in the imperial community. And even Mosley, who usually took the high road in matters of race, wrote that “much loose sentimentalism is poured out by those who in theory would hand over the earth to backward races in political self-government...The earth can and will be developed by the races fitted for that task, and chief among such races we are not afraid to number our own.”³⁸⁶

But, new technology had its uses in dealing with the ethnically and racially different populations of the Empire as well. In places like India, where the movement for home rule was fast gaining ground, perhaps a new technological spectacle would reinforce British superiority in the minds of the “natives.” This would help extinguish thoughts of equality and independence growing in the minds of Indians. With the debate over the India Bill (which passed in 1935), many on the far right worried that the loss of the “jewel in the crown” would be a fatal blow, and had to be stopped. Such were the fears that inspired Lady Houston to sponsor a grand British expedition in the Himalayas. She would finance the famous flights over Everest.

³⁸⁵ Geoffrey Dorman, “Aviation and the Empire: We are now Closer Neighbors,” *Action*, May 15, 1937, p.14.

³⁸⁶ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, p. 146.

A flight over the Himalayas would be a pioneering feat and test the absolute limits of high-altitude flight in open cockpits. The possibility of a high-altitude flight over Everest had been circulating for some time, when the Scottish pilot (and sometime boxing champion) Lord Clydesdale formulated his own plan.³⁸⁷ He knew of Lady Houston's reputation from her work with the Schneider Cup and understood from family connections that she might look favorably upon such an aviation coup. Clydesdale visited Lady Houston at her yacht and laid out his proposal. She neither endorsed nor rejected the plan, but resumed "her discussion of political matters which were clearly her main interest." After reviewing the plan, however, she eventually invited Clydesdale to her summer home in Scotland where she expressed her enthusiastic intentions to fund the project. She would grant not less than 100,000 pounds, and establish the office headquarters for the project. According to Clydesdale, Lady Houston made her intentions known that the flight could be used as a grand imperial gesture to a troublesome subject population. He later wrote that while the flight was "intended as a serious contribution to the science of aviation and as a survey of remote regions," Lady Houston said "it might be made to serve a political end by impressing a native population in India with the courage, endurance and vigor of the new generation of Britons."³⁸⁸ She expressed similar aims to her secretary, Wentworth Day. She made it clear to him that, "I am doing this not only to show the world that Britain can conquer the highest mountain in the world...but also to *show the people of India that the British Raj is still top-dog* and still their best friend. The Government have let our prestige

³⁸⁷ Lord Clydesdale is also considered part of the interwar extreme right. He had published views sympathetic to an understanding with the Nazis as war drew near. Later, when Rudolf Hess made his bizarre parachute jump into Scotland, he insisted on meeting only with Lord Clydesdale.

³⁸⁸ Lord Clydesdale and D. F. McIntyre, The Pilot's Book of Everest (London: William Hodge & Co., 1936), p. 9.

down in India by truckling to every agitator and enemy. This flight will raise it again to its proper place.”³⁸⁹ She had been convinced of the flight’s technical and imperial importance by Lord Semphill, another of the far right air enthusiasts, a Houston confidante, and former Schneider Cup pilot.

The flight went ahead as planned, helped along by the Royal Geographic Society, the Air Ministry, and as Day wrote, “that splendid old warrior of the air, C. G. Grey, editor of the *Aeroplane*.” It was successful in reaching top altitudes of 30,000 feet and passing over the peak of Everest. The planes were furnished by the Westland Company, with open cockpits and a bi-wing design. They were fitted with oxygen cylinders under the pilot’s seat which could feed into the pilot’s mask at the highest altitudes. The story of the flight is told by Clydesdale and McIntyre in their official memoir The Pilot’s Book of Everest, published in 1936. Their story is told as one of high adventure, and includes all the challenges of operating complex machinery under the effects of oxygen deprivation. The surveying photos, however, did not pan out, and so a second flight was scheduled. Lady Houston was dead set against another flight, worried about the risk of a second attempt. Fortunately, it flew successfully.

As far as the impact on science was concerned, the pilot’s learned a great deal about the problem of down-draughts at high altitude, which were caused by the deflection of wind against the highest mountains. The first oxygen systems for high altitude flight proved successful as well, though there were serious issues in learning how to regulate the flow. Finally, on the second flight, extensive photography was carried out which helped map and survey the most inaccessible terrain in the world. But, according to Day, the effect on the public consciousness was even greater than the scientific and technical impact: “The result electrified the world. It

³⁸⁹ Day, Lady Houston DBE, the Woman Who Won the War, p.205. (Italics mine).



The view from the cockpit of Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, Lord Clydesdale, during the Houston Everest flights, April 3, 1933. The flights smashed the high altitude flight records, pioneered high altitude breathing apparatus, and facilitated the mapping of the Himalayan Mountains. Lady Houston was also determined that these flights would provide a display of technological strength so powerful it would convince Indians that the “British Raj was still ‘top dog’,” and thereby undermine any thoughts of autonomy.

placed the prestige of Britain on a higher peak than ever. It enhanced the power and might of the British Raj at a critical period when such a magnificent gesture was badly needed. It gave a tremendous fillip to British aircraft and British aero-engines. Thereby it fulfilled Lady Houston's hopes and justified her faith in the men who flew the machines."³⁹⁰ In The Pilots' Book of Everest, which was as much a promotional publication as technical memoir, a photograph plate is included of a "native" Indian. He is elderly with a long gray, unkempt beard and the straw hat of an Indian agricultural laborer. He wears no shirt and is obviously toiling in the fields. Behind him one can see the vague outlines of other peasants plowing. His eyes are focused up to the sky, which was obviously intended to represent the captivation and amazement of the Indians, although he displays little in the way of expression. Below the photograph, the authors have included the caption, "The natives never lost their awe of the aircraft."

Economic Expressions of Exclusive Nationalism: From "Imperial Preference" to "Empire Free Trade" to "Imperial Autarky"

One of the strongest, and most traditionally British, expressions of exclusive nationalism was the dream of a self-sufficient and self-contained imperial economy. It did not originate with the extreme right in the interwar years, but had been a vital issue in Conservative politics since the end of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, of course, Britain's early industrial development produced enormous advantages. As the "workshop of the world," Britain was able to produce goods far cheaper and of better quality than the vast majority of its competitors. Therefore, the British governments of the early and mid 1800's advocated a policy of open and free trade and struggled to sustain (or impose) those policies around the world. This helped Britain continue to benefit from mercantilist-style trade with its older Empire, while establishing new conquests in the form of economic or "informal Empire." This term has been developed to

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 207.

describe Britain's domination of other regions through trade and its investment in their vital industries. After 1870, however, Britain's leading position in world trade began to steadily erode. Germany and the United States, among other nations, began to overtake Britain in the export of agricultural goods and especially in the manufacturing of old staples like iron, coal, and textiles. On top of this, these new competitors streaked ahead in a slew of new industries like chemicals, dyes, steel, and electric powered machinery. To alleviate their diminishing position in the world export trade, the British, among others, engaged in a burst of imperial expansion. This round of conquests provided Britain with cheap raw material supplies, ready markets for British goods, and prevented these territorial markets falling into the hands of the other great powers. This period from around 1870 to 1914 is commonly referred to as the era of "New Imperialism." In this imperial era, new lands were used for resource exploitation, politically administered rather than settled, and then incorporated into "neo-mercantilist" trade networks protected by tariff barriers. Britain's most visible advocate of a formally protected imperial system was Joseph Chamberlain. Early in his career Chamberlain had been a Liberal Party social reformer, creating the famous municipal "gas and water socialism" as the Mayor of Birmingham. Later, however, he split the Liberal party over the Ireland home-rule issue. His passionate belief in the Empire and its preservation led him to oppose Gladstone's Ireland Bill in 1886. This same fervor for Empire led him to take the post of Colonial Secretary, to a shadowy involvement in the origins of the South African War, and finally to the advocacy of a formalized imperial economic model. His economic model and policy crusade were known as "imperial preference." The system consisted of creating particular avenues of trade with the Empire, while blocking foreign goods in Britain through prohibitively high tariffs. The imperial exporters, however, would have "preference" in British markets paying either no tax or a greatly

diminished tariff rate. Within the Empire, high tariffs would also be used to ensure that Britain had ample markets for its manufactured goods while foreign exporters were blocked.

Chamberlain's campaign convinced many, but certainly not all on the Conservative right. The result was that by the turn of the century the Conservative party suffered an acrimonious split over the issue. This provided part of the opening for the rise of the Liberal Party, whose policy was quite firmly in favor of free and open trade.

In the 1920's the banner of "imperial preference" was taken up by two of Britain's most prominent press lords, Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook. As Britain's economic slump stubbornly hung on, and as Britain's Conservative politician's limited their remedial policies to "Safety First," the nation was ready to listen to alternatives. Beaverbrook led the charge publicly, (with Rothermere providing support through his press), and gave the campaign a new name. It was no longer "imperial preference," but in its new form it would be "Empire Free Trade." This twist of language was meant to diminish the objection of free-traders, but there was no doubt that this was simply another iteration of imperial protection. Beaverbrook even went as far as to press for high tariffs on foreign foodstuffs or "stomach tax," a policy which Rothermere had attacked for years. Failing to impose their beliefs on the Conservative Party, and disgusted with that Party's loss to Labour in 1929, the two created their own political organization in February of 1930 – the United Empire Party. The recent Wall Street crash and subsequent economic crisis made the party more viable as an alternative. It would appear, however, that some kind of deal was struck between Stanley Baldwin and Beaverbrook to run a public referendum on food tariffs and thus the party was disbanded on March 8. But, on April 3, the party lurched back into being, with Beaverbrook himself campaigning as candidate and party

leader. This would suggest that whatever bargain may have existed was quickly dashed.³⁹¹ Beaverbrook's and especially Rothermere's venomous attacks on all parties during the 1930 by-election campaigns, however, proved their undoing. After Rothermere wrote that Stanley Baldwin had lost his own family's fortune and was thus grossly unfit for national leadership, Baldwin responded very effectively. Using radio in a by-election speech for Duff Cooper, Baldwin announced that the article was a lie, but not worthy of fighting in the courts. If he did file suit, he said, "I should get an apology and heavy damages. The first is of no value, the second I would not touch with a barge pole." Then he cut to the core of the matter, saying "What the proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility – the prerogatives of the harlot throughout the ages."³⁹² The speech hit its mark and Cooper won the St. George's ballot in a landslide over Beaverbrook's candidate. This effectively finished the United Empire Party and it was dissolved soon after. The campaign left the stain of failure on the reputations of both men and also the general perception that both had used disreputable tactics. It is interesting that the blame for this ugly chapter is somewhat shifted onto the other partner by biographers of both men. A.J.P. Taylor says of Beaverbrook that he was manipulated by the stronger personality of Rothermere, claiming that Beaverbrook had "become his chosen instrument."³⁹³ S.J. Taylor, on the other hand, suggests in her mini-biography of Rothermere, that he was mixed up with the wrong kind of character in Beaverbrook. In fact, she says, "what the whole Empire Free Trade imbroglio had demonstrated was that Beaverbrook's bullying

³⁹¹ See A. J. P. Taylor, Beaverbrook (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), pp. 246-271.

³⁹² S. Baldwin, quoted in S. J. Taylor, The Great Outsiders, p.273.

³⁹³ A. J. P. Taylor, Beaverbrook, p. 269.

methods of advancement were useless in the political arena, and he sulked away, having made a public fool of himself.”³⁹⁴

But, soon after the Empire Free Trade campaign, there was another version of imperial preference in the succession of extreme right campaigns for economic nationalism. The formula for “Empire Free Trade,” had suggested that there would be free trade within the Empire, and significant tariffs on outside competitors. Mosley and the BUF would take this conception to further extremes. While Rothermere and Beaverbrook had been involved in their debacle, Mosley was formulating a similar, but more radicalized program. It is certainly one of the aspects of the BUF’s platform that compelled Rothermere to offer his support so willingly. We have already examined a great deal of the BUF ideology and platform in Chapter 1, but we must review a bit in order to identify Mosley’s economic expression of exclusive nationalism. Implicit in the policies of “Empire Free Trade,” was the need for some degree of a planned economic system, though Beaverbrook and Rothermere hesitated to state it plainly. Mosley’s BUF, however, was quite explicit about the need for national planning and made it an essential part of the fascist agenda. With a corporative state and a planned or “rationalized” structure, what would Britain’s economy look like, according to Mosley’s vision? First and foremost it would be a self-sufficient one, with no dependency on foreign capital, foreign materials, or foreign markets. Virtually all BUF writers cast Britain as a victim of its liberal politicians who were committed to free trade in conspiratorial alliance with “international finance.” In

Tomorrow We Live, Mosley wrote:

The international system, which the Labour Party supports, is innately dependent on international finance. It relies on the financier to supply credit, for the international transit and sale of goods, and capital for the ‘promotion of export trade’ by foreign loans.

³⁹⁴ S. J. Taylor, The Great Outsiders, p.274.

The supply of these facilities, by the great finance houses, makes utterly dependent upon them the whole system of international trade, and in turn, renders dependent upon them any Government which supports that system of trade.³⁹⁵

Dependence upon foreign money would be eliminated under Mosley's system. But, additionally, Mosley frowned upon the export of British capital and credit. They would, in the end, he argued, only undermine British production: "The only motive of foreign lending is to derive a higher rate of interest from the equipment of our competitors than from the equipment of British industry. That interest can only be drawn from foreign nations in the shape of gold, services or goods. As few of them have either gold or services to offer, the annual interest on foreign loans is derived almost entirely from the import of foreign goods."³⁹⁶

Like capital, said Mosley, manufactures were above all to be produced and distributed within the British imperial economy. This was a fundamental tenet of Mosley's economic system: "It is the settled policy of Fascism to build a Britain as far as possible self-contained and to exclude foreign goods which can be produced at home."³⁹⁷ Would foreign goods be excluded via high tariffs? "No," said Mosley, "for this purpose, Fascism will (legally) exclude foreign goods. Tariffs are useless, because they tax the consumer without keeping out foreign goods which are the product of cheap slave labor in foreign countries."³⁹⁸

Mosley's extremity of view in this area came partially out of conviction, but also partially as a result of the Ottawa trade agreements. These were reached in the Imperial Conference of 1932, while Mosley was writing his first book. The Ottawa Agreements re-instituted tariffs on goods

³⁹⁵ Mosley, Tomorrow, p. 135.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 136.

³⁹⁷ Mosley, Greater Britain, p. 126.

³⁹⁸ Mosley, 10 Points of Fascism. (London: BUF, 1934), p.5.

from nations outside the British Empire and created a structure of “limited imperial preference...and with the Dominions restored Britain to protectionism.”³⁹⁹ The Ottawa plan was implemented by 1934, but produced only limited benefits. But, it threatened to steal Mosley’s thunder in his urgent call for imperial autarky and also to create the perception that imperial preference was no economic panacea. Mosley and the BUF responded to this by railing in the fascist press against the National Government’s adopting a “soft” policy that used only minor tariffs. This half-way approach, they said, actually increased prices to consumers on foreign goods that still undermined British producers. For the BUF, then, only a severe exclusion of foreign goods could bring the benefits of a true imperial system.

Still, no nation could be (or can be) completely autarkic. What did Mosley recommend for those things which weren’t available or which couldn’t be produced in Britain? His answer was the British Empire. In his opinion, “Within the Empire we can produce all manufactured goods, foodstuffs, and raw materials we require.”⁴⁰⁰ He labeled this economic vision the “Empire System,” and wrote:

we turn to the Empire as the basis of our economic system...we are driven to our own Empire as the only alternative to chaos and exploitation...Empire industry must have a market for which to produce, and that is nothing else but the power of our people to consume. Deliberately, we build our Empire System that rests on the simple principle that the British people shall consume what the British people produce...*it is possible to build in our Empire alone, without the need of any assistance from the outside world of chaos, a far higher standard of life that we have today.*⁴⁰¹

What about Britain’s traditional reliance on exports? Mosley certainly did not discourage exporting manufactures, but was adamant that a system was needed that did not *rely* on the

³⁹⁹ Andrew Thorpe, Britain in the Thirties. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 73.

⁴⁰⁰ Mosley, 10 Points of Fascism, p. 5.

⁴⁰¹ Mosley, Tomorrow, p. 139-40.

export trade. He loudly challenged the mindset that placed exports at the top of the economic priority list. He wrote:

Yet the whole conspiracy of politicians, press and economists teaches the British people to believe that to send steel to a remote country to build a bridge over a far-away river, and to send bicycles for savages to ride over the bridge, without any hope of repayment of this exported wealth, is a transaction of sound economy...The greatest of all bluffs put over the British people is the loan-export bluff...⁴⁰²

He was convinced that the Empire provided adequate markets for British exports. In his analysis of agricultural products, for instance, he said, “If we can produce even 100 million pounds of foodstuffs in this country which we now import from abroad we could secure our ‘balance of trade’ within a self-contained Empire without any dependence on foreign markets for our exports.”⁴⁰³ This reiterated a consistent cry among British fascists and the far right. They were intensely afraid of Britain’s dependence on food imports in a time of heightened military tensions. They were convinced that Britain could be starved out in time of war. Mosley’s conception was, as we have seen, not one of brutal expansion (the concept so often associated with fascism), but one of *withdrawal*. Like so much of the extreme right rhetoric, policy, and culture, his program represented a plan for withdrawal and isolation—made possible through scientific rationality and technological modernization. In October of 1934 Mosley was given a two page spread in Lady Houston’s *Saturday Review*, including a full page photo. In his personal message, titled “Our Policy – Britain First!” he wrote “Let us free ourselves, as we can with the aid of modern science, from the chaos of the outside world.”⁴⁰⁴ Later, he wrote in 10 Points of Fascism, “Great nations can be self-contained once they are organized and

⁴⁰² Ibid. p. 137.

⁴⁰³ Mosley, Greater Britain, p. 125.

⁴⁰⁴ Oswald Mosley, “Our Policy – Britain First!” *Saturday Review*, February 10, 1934, p. 154.

scientifically protected from the shocks and dislocations of world chaos...A self-contained Empire will be *withdrawn* from that struggle, and the risks of war will be diminished.”⁴⁰⁵

Admiration for Fascist and Nazi Self-Sufficiency

The emphasis placed on economic self-sufficiency was not confined to British fascists and pro-fascists. Autarky was an essential part of fascist regimes on the continent, and Britain’s extreme right found much to admire in the ingenuity and resolve of the fascist nations. They especially admired the fascists’ marshalling of science and technology to meet the needs of self-sufficiency. The ability to withdraw from the vagaries of world finance capitalism was an example for Britons, and the fascist nations like Italy, Germany and later Spain, had shown it could be done.

In Italy, Mussolini had begun to move increasingly to economic self-sufficiency by the late 1920’s. The Duce proceeded in a fragmented way, with piece-meal measures until the mid 1930’s. He replaced his Economic Minister DeStephani with the committed protectionist Count Volpi in 1925, and soon after created his first autarkic national initiative, the “Battle for Grain.” He also personally intervened in the negotiations with the Ford Motor Company which was trying to establish an Italian branch. Mussolini, in the end, prohibited Ford from operating in Italy, thereby protecting Fiat and the other Italian manufacturers. But, it was not until the international crisis created by the Abyssinian invasion that Mussolini made autarky the number one national priority. After Italy had moved into the region, the League, with Britain’s support, instituted economic sanctions against Italy. Italians were outraged by them, but in fact they were a soft penalty for one nation invading another member nation (Italy had even sponsored Abyssinia for membership). Britain, for example, never closed the Suez Canal to Italian

⁴⁰⁵ Mosley 10 Points of Fascism, p. 5-6. Italics mine.

shipping. But, the sanctions, which took effect in October or 1935, had the effects of reducing Italy's imports by 30% and its exports by 7%.⁴⁰⁶ Mussolini used powerful depictions of national will fighting international tyranny in his rhetoric to inspire his people in their new challenge of autarky. In a speech to the National Guild Assembly in 1936 he announced, "The dominating problem in this new phase of Italian history will be that of securing in the shortest possible time, the maximum degree of economic independence for the Nation...the possibility of an independent foreign policy cannot be conceived without the corresponding possibility of economic self-sufficiency."⁴⁰⁷ A year later to the same group he rather over-dramatically remembered the tough days of 1935:

In those days, which are so near and already seem so far off, Badoglio was communicating to me his plans for the decisive battle... We then stood alone against all. An array of powers, such had never been seen before encircled Italy... since that day... a new event of immense significance for the history of Italy and of the world has occurred – that event is the Empire! The actual and potential resources of the Empire are exceptional... with its cotton, coffee, meat, hides, wool, lumber, precious ores, the Empire will make a decisive contribution to our effort for self-sufficiency... In a world like ours, armed to the teeth, to lay down the weapon of self-sufficiency would place us tomorrow – in the case of war – at the mercy of those who possess the means for carrying on hostilities without a time or consumption limit.⁴⁰⁸

Italy's drive for Empire had produced the international tensions that made severe autarky necessary. But, said Mussolini, the resources of Empire would facilitate Italy's future economic security and economic self-sufficiency for years to come. With economic independence, would come political independence. Italy would finally have the leverage to be one of the "Great Powers." That was the message of Mussolini's rhetoric, but in fact this did not come to pass.

⁴⁰⁶ Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 270.

⁴⁰⁷ Benito Mussolini, quoted in Report of Fascist Confederation of Industrialists 1936, p. 73.

⁴⁰⁸ Benito Mussolini, quoted in Report of Fascist Confederation of Industrialists, 1937, p. 80.

Abyssinia provided little in the way of meaningful natural resources, and the investments in building up the colony were actually a drain on Italy. Still, in the mid and late 1930's, the British far right was filled with admiration for Italy's shift to self-sufficiency. They respected the sacrifices Italians made, but also marveled at the imagination with which the Italian engineers and scientists had created raw material substitutes to pull the country through its difficult times.

In November of 1935, Lady Houston allowed Commendatore Luigi Villari to give a report from Italy on how the nation was progressing under the new pressures. Villari's article ran under the headline, "How Italy is Meeting the Sanctions," and in it he stressed Italy's new strategies for obtaining raw materials and finding energy substitutes with palpable nationalistic pride.

A special committee of the National Confederation of Industry under the chairmanship of Count Volpi has been set up to work out plans for making the best use of national raw materials and industrial equipment and for regulating the purchase of necessary imports. There are many minerals which normally were not mined because it was cheaper to import them. Now it is worthwhile utilizing these deposits even if they cost a little more. Thus the few Italian coal mines, including those of the Arsa in Istria, which produces over 1,000,000 tons a year of excellent coal, the anthracite of Sardinia and Val d'Aosta, the lignite of Tuscany and Umbria, the nickel of Piedmont and the lead, zinc, mercury mines in various parts of the country are being now exploited to their utmost capacity. Hydro-electric power is Italy's one great industrial asset, and although its development had begun several decades before the war, it has been speeded up very considerably during the last few years, and electric traction is being extended to an ever greater proportion of the railway mileages... a great impulse is given to inventiveness, in which the Italian people are by no means deficient, and no effort is spared to produce substitutes for imported commodities. Thus a substitute for wool has been found in a preparation of milk, and straw is to be used for the manufacture of paper.⁴⁰⁹

The admiration for Italian resolve and creativity was mixed with derision at the British move to proceed with sanctions. Sanctions against a natural ally, claimed the hard right, would not subdue a courageous nation like Italy. They would, however, result in undermining British exports and British production. Italy would find alternatives, but Britain's lost markets would be

⁴⁰⁹ Luigi Villari, "How Italy is Meeting the Sanctions," *Saturday Review*, November 30, 1935, pp. 520-521.

permanent, they feared. The M. P. Arnold Wilson, writing of his travels in Italy during 1935 and 1936, reported back that the people of Italy had turned their backs on the British and their goods. The Italians, he said, felt betrayed by a friend and while they would get through it, Britain would suffer permanent damage.

We shall not readily recover this market; repeated strikes and threats of strikes, and now 'sanctions' had taught Italians a lesson; German and Austrian goods had replaced British goods and the public and shopkeepers alike vowed that the change was permanent. The labels on British goods were being removed, stocks would not be renewed. They did not feel so strongly about France, but of us they felt, like the Psalmist, 'If it had been an enemy that had done me this dishonor then I could have borne it, but it was my own familiar friend whom I trusted.' Trade prohibitions had given a renewed fillip to the demand for economic self-sufficiency. Coal was being mined in Sardinia and Istria, and nickel in Piedmont; iron ore was being brought in great quantity from Elba. Beet was being grown for alcohol, for use in lieu of petrol as in France, and a plant to produce oil from coal was being erected. A substitute for wool was being made from casein, and for jute from broom; the cellulose industry, already well established, was active in other directions. From these developments we, who depend more than any other nation on international trade, were bound to suffer.⁴¹⁰

Later in his journey, Mussolini granted Wilson an audience and in that meeting he asked the Duce if there was hope for a return someday to normal trade. Mussolini replied "No, that cannot be. We have spent and are spending too much in creating fresh channels to take the place of those that you have taken the lead in diverting. We cannot abandon the mines we are opening, the great plants we are erecting, the long-term contracts we are making...public opinion has been aroused."⁴¹¹ Wilson was demoralized, and reached the sad conclusion that Britain was mortgaging its commercial future for the friendship of its Bolshevist enemies: "Sanctions had failed: irreparable damage was being done, not the least being the apparent attempt on our part

⁴¹⁰ Arnold Wilson, Thoughts and Talks, pp. 111-112.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.114.

to join hands with the Soviet Government, through its alliance with France, in a vain attempt to save not peace, but the League. I left Rome with a heavy heart.”⁴¹²

Germany also undertook a national initiative toward economic self-sufficiency in the 1930's. As with Mussolini, Hitler's regime made autarky an objective, but pursued it only fitfully at first. But, in 1936 Hitler called a secret meeting in which he announced his “irrevocable” intention to begin arming for the great conflict with the Soviet Union. Documentary evidence exists from the conference in the form of meeting notes taken by a Colonel Hossbach. According to his notes, Hitler had decided a purely German autarky could not be achieved in the short term. New territories would have to be taken to build an entirely autarkic and independent economic entity. For this reason, and because he felt the conflict with Bolshevism was inevitable, Hitler announced his plan for Germany to move into re-armament on a national scale. To make such a huge undertaking possible, however, Germany could not rely on the economic assistance of other nations. Hitler was convinced that Germany would have to become as self-sufficient as possible in order to accomplish its objectives. One result of this reasoning was Hitler's creation of the “Four Year Plan,” which he announced that year at the Party Rally in Nuremburg. He put Hermann Goering in charge of the program, and created the Office of the Four Year Plan. Goering's office worked with Germany's industrialists to wean them from foreign materials, and to shift their production and technologies to facilitate national self-sufficiency. Goering, whose office's organizational chart would soon fill six pages, ordered the mobilization of chemical companies like I.G. Farben to solve the fuel crisis, ordered increases in the production of synthetic rubbers to solve the shortage of natural rubber and the same with iron-ore, fats, textiles and light metals. Knowing of Hitler's obsession with autarky, Goering gradually consolidated

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 115.

his position and emerged as the single most powerful economic influence in the country. The more liberal-minded and once prominent Economic Minister Hjalmar Schacht faded into relative obscurity. From 1936, autarky was Germany's dominant and outright economic priority.

Some on Britain's extreme right, while admiring Germany's self-sufficiency, blamed the democratic nations for forcing Germany, and other fascist powers, into such policies. A. P. Laurie believed that the wealthier democratic nations like Britain, France, and the United States, had chosen to economically squeeze the fascist powers into submission. The public were misguided, he said, in thinking that the withdrawal of the fascist powers was due to their preparation for war. The fascist powers only wanted peace, but had no choice as they were being choked by the world monopoly of international (read Jewish) finance. Laurie presented the fascist nations as victims forced into the paradoxical combination of conquest and autarky.

Extraordinary misconceptions of the nature and purpose of the four years' plan have become common in this country... The question of raw materials is an international question, in that there are monopolies held by some nations to the impoverishment of other nations... The World Monopoly of raw materials, controlled principally by the British Empire and international financial interests, which are held principally in Great Britain and the USA, is creating a serious economic problem in many nations of which three are most prominent today – Japan, Germany and Italy – but France and Russia naturally stand in with us. The problem is, as I have said, the primitive one of food, and Japan, Germany and Italy are the three nations of the first rank who form the triple spearhead for a world demand for free trade in raw materials.⁴¹³

Laurie's position as a pro-Nazi mouthpiece is more than evident here as he suggests that the fascist nations had been forced by the democratic nations to invade China and Abyssinia. As for Germany, its self-sufficiency was also forced upon its people, but they were responding heroically, he said, with the aid of its scientific community. It was the World Monopoly which was preparing for war, not Germany. A famous chemist himself, Laurie said that "While other

⁴¹³ A. P. Laurie, The Case for Germany, pp. 130-131.

nations are spending more and more on armaments, Germany is directing her efforts to increasing the productivity of her soil, and the development of new and valuable products which the genius of her chemists is extracting synthetically from her two raw materials, coal and wood.”⁴¹⁴ No, the real reason that Germany was unpopular and that its forced autarky was portrayed as dangerous was that the supposed international financial cartel could no longer make Germany dependent upon its funds. Therefore, this abstract entity declared to the world, through its presses, that Germany’s self-sufficiency was connected to aggression.

Each economist has a new theory of money more elaborate than the last which all his fellow economists attack. Germany, when the Nazi party came into power, was in the position of having been stripped of all outside investments, of all gold, and in addition being heavily in debt to the financiers in outside countries for money borrowed to pay reparations. The new Government would have been quite justified in doing what other revolutionaries had done and repudiated the external debt... With no gold, no foreign exchange, six million unemployed and starving farmers she determined to go back to the fundamental principles of economics which have been lost sight of by the financiers of other countries. One thing she was determined on. Not to go into the world financial market and borrow money ever again. *This is the real quarrel that we and the USA, the two big moneylenders, have with her.* If she came to the “city” to borrow 100 millions all the attacks in the Press, the denunciations on platforms, the utilization of the fugitive Jew as a political stunt would stop. *The City pulls the strings and the Press obey.*⁴¹⁵

Laurie was a Nazi fanatic by this time (1939), and the ex-Professor of Chemistry was quite taken with Germany’s scientific solutions to self-sufficiency. But, ordinary Britons on the far right could be equally impressed with German techno-science and its place in autarky. Sidgwick, for instance, in German Journey wrote about his tour of processing facilities and exhibits and his conversations with the scientists who were engineering this new self-reliance. He brought together the themes that recur in the British pro-fascist discussions of autarky – that

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p.134.

the continental powers had been forced into their policies, and that their success in this area was an example to all. He must be quoted at length.

The next morning, as grey and grimy as ever, I went to see an exhibition of goods made in the Ruhr valley. It was an astonishing array of things, more so when I was told by the director that it represented an enormous effort on the part of the Ruhr manufacturers. He told me that since the depression, Germany, having had no gold or foreign credits, had been unable to buy raw materials from abroad: and without raw materials from abroad the vast machinery of the Ruhr workshops had had to remain idle. After Hitler had taken charge of the country a great drive had been made against this, and as even he had been unable to persuade foreign financiers to loan money, their scientists had got to work in the Ruhr to force raw materials from German soil. They had experimented with coal and with iron, they had looked here and looked there, trying and trying and trying to make their own inferior raw materials do the work. They had had a certain amount of success. Petrol had been drawn from coal, and synthetic rubber of sorts had been made too. I saw some of these products, and what I saw left me marveling at German ingenuity and concentration. There must be some sort of “we won’t be beat” feeling in the Ruhr character, because from practically nothing they had produced a huge assortment of mining apparatus, drills and picks and steel props, paint, glass, petrol, chemicals, dentists’ and doctors’ surgical instruments, springs, locks, keys, watches, wire, pumps, railway lines, Bakelite ware in forms from nests of ashtrays to telephone instruments, aluminum, gas, oil, paper, dyes, and a grim collection of bomb-proof shelters, fireproof and gas-proof suits of overalls, and gas masks. Many of the processes were described to me by a young research scientist who lived wholly in a world of formulas and solutions and equations. The ingenuity was there, and the whole array of things said a lot for the persistency of the Ruhr people. But it did not, quite clearly, say much for the sanity of the world.⁴¹⁶

The “Oil from Coal” Campaign

The extreme right press was filled with articles and sustained campaigns urging similar actions in Britain. Economic insulation was one of the most urgent of the policies advocated by the far right. The BUF press was every week filled with several articles crying out against the encroachment of foreign suppliers in Britain and their penetration of the imperial markets. A special target was Asian producers. Fascists fought against imperial manufactures from foreign locations like India. The rise of “tropical populations” manufacturing cheaper goods, especially cotton textiles, was destroying British production in a terrible reversal of the mercantilist system.

⁴¹⁶ Sidgwick, *German Journey*, pp. 53-54.

Meanwhile, South and East Asians were willing to work under terrible conditions, “sweated labor,” which was the key to the low price of their goods. But, producers outside the Empire were an even more ominous threat. The expansion of Japanese manufactures, for instance, came in for repeated criticism in all the organs of extreme right opinion. The “sweated” Japanese workers produced ridiculously cheap goods, which British Governments then allowed through trade agreements to undercut British manufactures; and often within their own Empire. Free trade, said the far right, was a road to disaster and servitude.

Stories throughout these publications criticized the destruction of Lancashire’s manufacturing, the ruination of British agricultural producers, and the dying off of Britain’s timber industry. These industries had to have substantive protection to be insulated from the madness of the outside world. With the passing of the India Bill in 1935, for instance, the *Saturday Review* passed its sad verdict by running a story titled, “No Hope for Lancashire!” In the *Daily Mail* pieces were consistently run begging for international protection. Especially important to Rothermere and his editors was British shipping, which was losing ground as foreign manufacturers penetrated the imperial markets. A 1933 headline shouted, “British Ships for British Trade!” and insisted “Those countries whose trade with Great Britain shows an adverse balance should be obliged to use British ships to redress the balance. All trade between ports within the Empire should be reserved to British ships. United Kingdom coastwise trade should be reserved for British ships.”⁴¹⁷ Other stories focused on the “new industries” of the modern age, and Britain’s need to protect their position. The language of these campaigns again conveys unmistakably the near obsession with withdrawal, isolation, and anti-alienism. In the auto industry, for instance, fears stirred over French encroachment into the British Market. An

⁴¹⁷ “British Ships for British Trade,” *Daily Mail*, November 23, 1933, p. 3

article in *Action* was headlined, “A Dangerous Invader,” and lamented the French ability to penetrate Britain’s auto market because of the decline of the franc. This was enabling “French goods to be dumped on the British market. French frocks and shoes are undercutting us in every shopping centre,” said “Lynx,” and “French cars are attempting to do the same. The Delage, always an extremely good luxury car which sold at something around 1,000 pounds, is now on sale here at medium car price...” This was unfair to British manufacturers, Lynx went on, and the state was obliged to step in. After all, British manufacturers could only be expected to compete with “the factory price of goods. They must not be penalized because of currency fluctuation in other countries. It is probably too much to hope that a financial democratic Government would prohibit the importation of these cars...”⁴¹⁸

Likewise with the film industry, the far right pressed for industrial protection, mostly from American film companies. This was important to them for both economic reasons and for reasons of artistic taste. One piece that concentrated on the fortunes of British film engineers, made it very clear under the headline, “Britain Needs a Closed Shop!”

I should like to see the British (film) industry enjoying the benefits of a closed shop. Hollywood actors have done it, the technicians are still fighting for it. Ask technicians whether they want it. Deputations have gone to Parliament. Hundreds of technicians formerly employed by UFA and other film companies are now working in British studios. British technicians are out of work. I am not concerned with the nationality of these visitors from Germany: I’m concerned with the welfare of British workers...British actors and technicians – men and women who can beat the world, given the opportunity – should, can, *must* be protected. This page will support any organization designed to attempt the task.⁴¹⁹

With fascist and pro-fascist campaigns constantly crying out for imperial autarky, one of the problems that confronted their agenda was the lack of some vital materials not available either in

⁴¹⁸ Lynx, “A Dangerous Invader,” *Action*, Nov. 28, 1936, p. 10.

⁴¹⁹ “Britain Needs a Closed Shop,” *Action*, May 22, 1937, p. 3.

Britain or within the Empire. The Empire was vast enough to contain most materials, but in the cases of exceptionally vital resources, the need to rely on the Empire was seen as problematic. Such an example was petroleum fuel. Britain maintained imperial control over areas in the Middle East, mostly in Mesopotamia, which were good suppliers of oil. But, many on the far right found the need to hang on to this unstable part of the Empire just for fuel, a waste of British resources. Further, they were certain that the need to transport such a vital material in time of war would make Britain highly vulnerable. Their answer to this dilemma grew from the extreme right's confidence in science and technology to solve the fuel production problem. The result was one of the extreme right's most vocal campaigns through the 1930's: the Oil-From-Coal campaign. The idea was to shift Britain away from the use of crude oil, and develop the sciences and the facilities for extracting petroleum from coal, which Britain had in abundance. Self-sufficiency in the area of energy was a powerful and emotional issue; and, of course, remains so today.

One of the earliest voices in this campaign came from Lord Londonderry, who was immersed during the late 1920's and early 1930's in Britain's stubborn coal crisis. In his 1931 treatise Towards Industrial Statesmanship, Londonderry emphasized that Britain would not find its way out of the coal crisis exclusively through labor negotiations. A more creative and forward thinking approach was needed, he said. Londonderry urged the coal owners to embrace the potential for coal that scientific processes promised, rather than being consumed by the labor costs of its extraction from the pit. The future was not in the traditional uses of coal, but in coal's potential to yield new kinds of chemical resources.

There is one other point upon which I should like to add a few words – the treatment of coal after it has been brought to the pit head and before it passes to the consumer... We are doing so at Seaham, but I feel that we are only at the beginning of really important developments in this direction in the coal industry. Whether we continue to sell coal for

consumption as coal – as for many purposes we shall do for some time to come – or whether we extract oil and gas from it before disposing of it, or whether we pulverize it, I am convinced that we shall have to pay as much attention to marketing our product in such a way as to extract every fraction of value out of it, as we do to the actual business of winning it at the lowest possible cost. We must in fact, get rid of the idea that our task is to produce coal and nothing else, and that it is finished when we have got the raw material to the surface and persuaded somebody to buy it from us. The real development in colliery practice in the future lies as much on the surface as underground and in keeping control of our product to the last possible moment instead of parting with it at the earliest.⁴²⁰

Londonderry's voice, here, sounds quite modern.

E. T. Good, writing in the *Saturday Review* in 1933 was equally concerned about the coal crisis, but he added a new twist. Londonderry's comments reflected the most pressing issues of the time. In 1931 the economic problems of the depression were far more important than international issues. But, by 1933, issues of national security were becoming an essential ingredient in the coal debate. Good's article, still in the embryo stages of the campaign, urges British ships to run on British fuel rather than foreign (or imperial) sources. He, in fact, advocated re-fitting the British ships to burn coal and building new ones with this capacity.

If the Government will have all new naval ships designed to use coal, and induce merchant ships-owners to have all new vessels coal-driven, and if, further, many oil burners afloat are converted to use coal, our mining industry will get a big lift up, miners will have more work and wages, and many more men will find employment on railways and docks, and in the engineering and shipbuilding trades. Not only so, but our national security, in the event of war, will be better assured....The foreign oil magnates are getting together with a view to making an international agreement to restrict supplies and advance the price of oil fuel, and they have the support of some Governments.⁴²¹

Good's notion of the mutual importance of internal benefits and national security would define the objectives of the campaign, but his idea of retro-fitting machinery to accommodate old coal burning technologies would not. Nor would other campaigns which recommended the

⁴²⁰ Lord Londonderry, *Towards Industrial Statesmanship*, pp. 38-39.

⁴²¹ E. T. Good, "British Coal for British Ships," *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1933, p. 120.

production of petrol from farming produce.⁴²² The campaign emerged by 1933 into an all out call for the derivation of petrol from domestic coal in order to re-energize the British coal industry and to make Britain completely self-sufficient for its energy.

The first article to put the campaign in its final form appeared in August of 1933, in one of the earliest editions of *The Blackshirt*, under the headline, “Oil From Coal: Millions of Gallons in Sight – Government Wavers.” The anonymous article rejoiced at the scientific progress that had been made in extracting oil from coal, though admitted it was not yet cost-effective. Despite this, the program had to move forward because of the other economic and security benefits for the country at large. Advocating a strong government policy and subsidization for a number of years, the article carefully itemized the benefits that would accrue.

The manufacture of home-produced motor spirit has gone far beyond the experimental stage, and although, at present, it is not possible to produce this Spirit below the cost of imported Petrol, it is a commercial proposition, provided a guaranteed preference is given to the home produced article for a certain number of years. Based on present information, here are some of the results that would follow: --

- A. For a total production of 10 million tons of mixed oils per annum.
 - 1. An annual consumption of 30 million tons of coal
 - 2. Permanent employment of 90,000 men at hydrogenation works, and 100,000 men at the mines, a total of 200,000 men.
- B. For a total production of 30 million tons of mixed oils per annum
 - 1. An annual consumption of 90 million tons of coal
 - 2. Permanent employment of 270,000 men at the works and 300,000 men at the mines, a total of nearly 600,000 men.

No doubt very large capital sums would be required for the construction of the works, but this money would be spent in Great Britain in the creation of a great productive industry, necessary for our national independence and security.⁴²³

⁴²² See “Petrol Substitutes,” *Saturday Review*, April 7, 1933, p. 331.

⁴²³ “Oil From Coal,” *The Blackshirt*, August 5, 1933, p. 3.

Whether accurate or not, Mosley's party claimed that the unemployment problem would be one quarter eliminated with this single great project alone. But, the article went on to lament, Britain's outdated "Old Gang," had no such vision.

What a wonderful opportunity this would be to men who thought of business first and politics last! Under a Fascist Government, with the aid of technical experts, directed by a powerful mind, the essential plant could be erected in all coal producing areas, especially in South Wales, where the blight of unemployment has descended with such appalling affect for so many years. The coal industry which has since the war been slowly destroyed by the use of oil for transport of all kinds, would quickly revive; and new hope instilled in the minds of those who have known only despair for so long. But, the Government, as usual, is weak and vacillating. It has here a great opportunity to restore a great industry to its former position of eminence, and to create another vial industry, which would help Britain to regain the proud position which our Old Gang politicians are doing their best to undermine. But they fiddle with an opportunity that has such enormous potentialities.⁴²⁴

The most eloquent statement for deriving Britain's petrol from coal came from the BUF's designated expert on the issue, George Sutton. Sutton published numerous articles advocating coal based fuel, but his most thorough essay was published in the supposedly more cerebral journal, *Fascist Quarterly*. Here, Sutton wrote a lengthy treatise titled, "A Way Through the Coal Crisis," which included not only the reasoning behind pursuing coal based fuel, but summarized the technical issues associated with various scientific processes. First he defined the problem:

We have, therefore, the combination of technical improvements reducing the consumption of coal in industry, the substitution of oil for coal bunkering, the reduction in our export trade, and the mechanization of production resulting in the reduced output of coal; the incessant struggle to maintain our export markets against the increasing competition from countries whose standard of living is considerably lower than ours with the results we see today – agitation from the employers for reduced payments to miners and a counter-agitation by the mine workers for improved conditions, coupled with an apparently insoluble unemployment problem... We imported over 2,000,000,000 gallons of oil fuel in 1934, and the amount is growing. But less than two per cent. of this oil is produced within the British Empire. Practically every oil company throughout the world is connected in one way or another, either financially by representation on boards of

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

directors, by working arrangements, so that oil represents one of the greatest vested interests the world has ever known; a powerful one and, if necessity arose, an implacable one.⁴²⁵

To avoid this dilemma Britain would have to find ways to produce oil fuel at home and here Sutton went into the technical details of various methods. After discussing the merits of both high and low temperature carbonization, he concluded that the hydrogenation process was the most promising for the future. In hydrogenation, the coal is first pulverized to fine powder and mixed into a kind of paste with heavy oil. The paste is then inserted into vertical reaction chambers with a mix of hydrogen, and then placed under enormous pressure under extremely high temperatures. A catalytic element is then added to the process, generally ferric oxide, which produces the reaction of separating the solution into varieties of oils, among which is pre-refined petrol. Sutton was convinced that this was the most efficient method and avoided the problems associated with low temperature carbonization, which produced the by-product of “coalite.” Coalite was a less efficient, but much cleaner version of the raw coal consumers burned in their furnaces. Even though coalite had the great advantage of being smokeless, Sutton lamented that the British public were not forward-thinking, and would resist the change. Once again we see fascists and/or pro-fascists defining themselves through comparison with others who were supposedly stuck in the past. Sutton said of the problem, “progress in the extraction of oil from coal by the Low Temperature Carbonization process depends to a large extent on instructing the public in the advantages of the use of smokeless fuel over that of raw coal. To be effective, this can only be done by local legislation. The British public is incurably

⁴²⁵ George Sutton, “A Way Through the Coal Crisis,” *Fascist Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October, 1935, p. 456, 458.

wedded to the open fire with raw coal, and in the main will not of its own volition change over to any other forms of heating.”⁴²⁶

Sutton summed up his article by restating the opportunity and cursing Britain’s liberal democracy for its inability to take such a great initiative in hand.

Politically and nationally the question of producing our own oil supplies is of paramount importance...In the event of an attack our whole resources, military, naval, air and industrial dependent at present on imported oil might easily be crippled by attacks from enemy powers...To solve both the national and economic problem at the same time demands the concentration of Governmental, technical, scientific, and all necessary resources of the country. The question thus arises. Is it likely or possible that Party Governments – financed and controlled as they are by the great interests to whom national interests are as nothing in comparison with the question of safeguarding their investments – would be willing to effect this economic revolution? The answer must inevitably be in the negative. The great oil interests have too much at stake to permit the growth of a national oil industry which must mean the exclusion of their own products, and the extinction of Great Britain as a market for them. A Fascist Government, untrammelled by this powerful and unscrupulous element in political, financial and economic life, with men and a programme consecrated to rapid action in the national interests only, can alone *achieve this aim of a self-contained Empire.*⁴²⁷

The BUF emphasis on the oil from coal campaign was serious enough to make it part of the party’s lengthy policy statement, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered. Under the question regarding the plan for Britain’s coal industry, Mosley answered by first outlining his plans for re-organization and for including coal miners in their own corporation. He moved on, though, to what he felt would truly save the industry, and that was the shift to petrol production. Technology had changed and the coal industry had to move with the times. But in the process Britain would become energy independent.

Foreign oil and petrol will be excluded, and Britain will be supplied with oil and petrol from her own coal. This alone will give employment to over 90,000 miners. Modern science has made it possible to produce oil and petrol from British coal without increase

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 459.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 462.

of price to the consumer, as is shown in our detailed publications. This great development is at present prevented by the fact that the City of London has 140,000,000 pounds invested in foreign oil and petrol companies, and its interests will be adversely affected by giving employment to British miners in the production of coal from which oil and petrol will be extracted...Fascism as ever subordinates the interests of the international financier to those of the British producer.⁴²⁸

After Sutton and the BUF, during the later 1930's the great leader of the oil-from-coal crusade was Barry Domvile. As part of his conception of re-engineering the naval fleet with a larger proportion of smaller, more mobile ships, he had also advocated making that fleet independent of foreign energy sources. In Look to Your Moat he had made his ideas plain about energy dependence, saying, "the idea is that there can be no risk of being cut off from any commodity like oil, as the action which the country will be taking will be on behalf of the League and will therefore receive the support of its members...a good many of us would feel happier if our security was safeguarded by our own Empire without reliance on external sources."⁴²⁹ Later he reiterated that point by pointing out that the sea had always been kind to Britain, even shown Britain special favor. But, the sea was not likely to continue that kind of special treatment for a country that foolishly frittered away its own self-reliance. While in the past Britain and the sea shared the closest of relations, "never before had he (the sea) seen us place ourselves in a situation in which our country was dependent on the favor of foreign countries for our fuel – by our own choice – and by a display of such exquisite confidence as must surely win the oily hearts of our self-appointed masters."⁴³⁰

In the years that followed, Domvile told his diary of his speaking schedule. As he left the Anglo-German Fellowship behind, after his retirement he took on regular speaking engagements

⁴²⁸ Mosley, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered, p. 10.

⁴²⁹ Domvile, Look to Your Moat, p. 192.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

associated with his new group, the Link. Included in nearly all of his speeches on military modernization policy and economic autarky, was a section on oil-from-coal, one of his particular passions. He wrote in his diary in February, 1939, that “I gave a longish address on Naval policy” and to his immense pleasure, “the back to coal part was the best received!”⁴³¹ In 1937, as he also recorded in his diary, his position as informal, but well known, crusader for oil from coal earned him an invitation to speak in Parliament the following Spring. A commission had been formed by Sir Thomas Inskip to examine Britain’s defense energy sources. Domvile worked for several days on his speech, which he saw as a great opportunity indeed. Before the meetings he was invited to a grand luncheon he described as the “oil luncheon,” and as having included many important figures from the oil, chemical and railway industries. In April of 1938, Domvile describes his appearance before the committee. While he was obviously elated to be in high company again, he suggests it was a bit of a let-down, saying only, “I spoke for about half an hour...they are all set on oil, I fear, but I think I did some good.”⁴³²

Despite the efforts of Sutton and Domvile and the united efforts of the extreme right press, Britain did not embrace oil from coal in anything like the measure they hoped for. In the end, Britain was able to keep itself supplied with oil during the War from its Empire and the United States, never needing to invest the massive amounts in oil-from-coal extraction. After the War, the Marshall Plan and then the North Sea Oil discoveries all but erased such thinking. About all that fascists and pro-fascists could do, during the War, was gloat over the Government’s consideration of the policy and then attack it for having waited too long. In one of the last run editions of *Action*, just before the 18b arrests, an article ran under the headline, “Oil From Coal:

⁴³¹ Domvile Diary Manuscripts, February 23, 1939, DM/56.

⁴³² Domvile Diary Manuscripts, April 5, 1938, DM/56.

Technicians Advocate BU Policy.” Clinging to the words of legitimate scientists for credibility, the author caustically wrote:

A leading scientist has made a romantic discovery! This “discovery” is one the British Union has advocated and demanded for many years past. Mr. F. Heron Rogers, president of the Institute of Chemical Engineers, in his presidential address last week, informed the pundits that ‘this country out of its natural resources could make itself independent of overseas oil supplies and could even have exportable surplus supplies.’ This follows quickly Mosley’s question last week, why we help maintain a large army in the Near East to protect oil fields, when we can get all the oil we want from our own coal...Now when it is too late, the Government are seriously considering the setting up of a similarly synthetic (fuel production) plant. The cost will now be enormously increased through war-time conditions and the necessary apparatus difficult to obtain. In any case, the effort will be tentative and half-hearted. The Oil Barons will glower and the Governments’ intentions will collapse. Before the twin reptiles of oil and finance, “Democratic” Governments will retreat like frightened rabbits.

A few months later, most of Britain’s fascists and clear pro-fascists were in jail.

The Symbolic Language of Exclusive Nationalism: Walls, Shields, and Moats

The Extreme right’s most fervent agenda items, when examined together, reflect a preoccupation with exclusive nationalism and isolationism. Britain, of course, possessed a vast Empire, and this might seem to be a great contradiction. But, no one on the extreme right advocated its expansion. Rather, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, the most urgent imperial issues were its preservation and its consolidation into a self-contained whole. The fear of outside chaos and the hope for insulated safety was expressed in many forms of both policy and imagery. The most prevalent of these policy issues were modernized rearmament and the call for an autarkic imperial economy. Some of the most interesting cultural reflections of this isolationist ethos were the language and depictions describing walls, shields, fences or moats that permeated far right discourse. Looking at a few examples of these helps us to see the intensity with which the extreme right longed for protection behind barriers. Most often it was modern technology, they believed, that would provide those barriers.

Ships were a common subject in the language of barriers. Sir Barry Domvile regularly pictured the Navy and Britain's great ships as providing a figurative bulwark against attack. He wrote articles in the pro-fascist press entitled, "Can Britain be Attacked? We still have a Moat!" For him the moat was not the English Channel or the seas around Great Britain. The metaphorical moat was Britain's Navy. He used the term again in his book of 1937, which was examined in detail in Chapter 6. The book was tellingly titled Look to Your Moat, and encouraged Britons to consider the matters of sea defense first and foremost in the newly dangerous international climate. With the arrival of air power, the fleet had to be re-designed to be faster, and he recommended a re-focusing upon newer, faster cruisers rather than enormous battleships. He was greatly upset, he confided to his diaries, that the book sold very little and the positions he advocated were essentially ignored by the Navy and the general public.⁴³³ In the end, of course, he was wrong about the need for light cruisers. It was aircraft carriers that made the crucial difference in the Second World War, with other ships mostly doing battle with one another simply to protect carrier fleets.

A spread in the *Saturday Review* in July 1935 featured several articles regarding naval construction and the need for modernization. The articles pleaded for replacing old models, and for facing the reality that reduction in fleet size was no longer possible due to the failure of disarmament. But in the middle of the articles, Lady Houston included a long poem entitled "The Sure Shield of Britain"

The sower goes forth sowing,
The fisher plies his net,
The factory fires are glowing,
We plough our furrows yet,
Whence comes our grace to till the field?
Under the Lord – from "Ships – our Shield!"

⁴³³ See Domvile Diaries, 1937, DM/55.

The voice of happy reaper
Is heard throughout the land.
Peaceful – the toil worn sleeper
Rests – for “our bulwarks” stand
Sleepless – for the grace to reap our field
Comes from the Lord – and “Ships – our Shield!”

Our children go forth gaily
To desk, and work, and play
While, unmolested daily,
We pass upon our way.
We should, for this, our heart’s thanks yield
Unto the Lord – and “Ships – our Shield!”

From east to west – from south and north,
The Empire’s long-linked chain
Of laden ships go safely forth
Bearing the Toiler’s grain.
That they sail safe – our thanks we yield
Unto the Lord – and “Ships—our Shield!”

Another chain doth bind us
(All other links above)
To God and King and Country
To the Golden Chain of Love!
For Peace on earth – our thanks we yield
Unto the Lord – and “Ships – our Shield!”

Ponder – and put from out you
The evil from your Coasts
Stand clean! Then never doubt you
The Lord goes with your hosts!
And God His Mighty Power shall wield
Through His Good Grace – for “Ships – our Shield!”

Meriel Leeson-Marshall

In addition to shields and moats, walls were the most commonly used image in the extreme right campaign for isolation. Certainly the walls of other nations were admired and held up as an example for Britain. Such an example was the French government’s enormous project in the construction of the ultimate wall – the great Maginot Line. The Maginot Line was an enormous

string of interconnected fortresses constructed along France's Eastern border with Germany. France had sunk a great majority of its defense budget into this strategy of defense and insulation. It was a remarkable complex of technologies with deep underground barracks, underground railways, underground electric power plants, above ground artillery placements, and observation equipment. But, in their writings that applauded the Maginot Line, British far right analysts actually praised its capabilities for aggression. E. G. Mandeville Roe, a published proponent of corporatism and a BUF political candidate, wrote a piece for *Action* that assessed the "true" nature of the great fortification. Appearing in 1937, the article's headline read, "The Strategy of the Maginot Line, When Fortifications are Aggressive." Roe felt that the British public and the government misunderstood the nature of France's defensive strategy. It was, he said, in fact defense through offensive capability.

The general impression in England was that the French were wasting both time and money, as Maubege, Namur, Antwerp, and even Liege had shown in 1914 that fortresses and forts are no good against modern guns. This view betrayed that nobody understood the real purpose of the Maginot Line. It is an offensive, not a defensive system. The most important part of it is on the banks of the Rhine, armed with powerful guns, from which, if war broke out, such important places as Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Darmstadt, Mainz and Worms could at once be shattered by bombardment without the necessity of a single French soldier stepping over the German frontier.⁴³⁴

Roe's analysis is similar to so much of the extreme right opinion on air armaments, which saw Britain's ability to bomb others as being in itself the best defense. Britain's fascists and pro-fascists were urgently concerned with withdrawal, but it was offensive technologies they believed that would provide a metaphorical wall, through deterrence. Roe's article went on to say that the Maginot Line offered an offensive capability superior even to the bomber. The French, through massive state investment in new technology, had made themselves "capable

⁴³⁴ E. G. Mandeville Roe, "The Strategy of the Maginot Line: When Fortifications are Aggressive," *Action*, June 5, 1937, p. 6.

today of something new in war, *an invasion by artillery-fire alone*, a much safer form of aggression for themselves than even wholesale aerial bombing would be, where they stand to lose a certain number of pilots and machines.”⁴³⁵

The BUF press stuck to its admiration of the Maginot Line, even in the days of May, 1940, as German tanks rolled through the Ardennes forest. *Action* certainly criticized the French government, but not for its decision to invest all its resources in a defensive barrier. The concept of a wall was not the problem, said the editors. Rather, the problem was that the French had not built *enough* fortifications. As Nazi tanks poured into France, they wrote of the French blunders of under-construction.

We will not press the point now, but we put on record the enquiry, “Why, during the eight months which have elapsed since the war began, was the Maginot Line not constructed right up to the sea?” It is notable that the Germans have not attempted to attack the main Maginot Line, but have only attacked where the defense line, according to a late War Secretary, only consists of surface works. In the last war we had surface works. Since then the great subterranean works, which apparently exist in both the Maginot and the Siegfried Lines, have been invented. Why were such works not completed up to the sea?⁴³⁶

The walls of other nations were an example for Britain, according to far right thinking. Britain needed its own protective fortifications, real or metaphorical. There exist a number of political cartoons in the far right press which contain powerful imagery and messages regarding this obsession with walls and withdrawal. They are especially interesting as they show how the mentality of walls and insulation intersected with some of their other most cherished issues. The first of these examples appeared in Grey’s *Aeroplane* in March of 1934. In this cartoon, a hulking, bearded Russian, complete with fur hat, leans on his new fighter aircraft laughing at representatives from France and Britain. Above him vultures circle, which fade into the shapes

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 6. (Italics his).

⁴³⁶ “The Maginot Line,” *Action*, May 16, 1940, p. 1.

of air squadrons. In front of the Bolshevik, smaller politicians, one in French military dress and the other with British top hat, hold up a dilapidated wooden fence. The fence is splintered and barely holding together while the two desperate figures hold it up against the guffawing Russian and his modern plane. Behind the figures, Hitler can be made out. He is observing the scene from behind what is clearly a crenellated castle wall. Germany, it was implied, had a substantive fortification (presumably modernized air defense) that was impenetrable. As the Fuhrer watches the Bolshevik threat he says to himself, "My job tomorrow." The cartoon seeks to convince us that Hitler's re-armament was not at all a threat at this point, but rather the British and French faced the true threat of Bolshevism; lacking a modernized air fleet, they were ill-equipped to do so. They were clearly not up to the challenge, and had not developed the infrastructure to protect themselves. It would fall to a more advanced Germany, which now possessed the tools, to deal with the looming Russian shadow.

The next example comes from Lady Houston's *Saturday Review* and (perhaps not surprisingly) portrays Lady Houston herself as the savior of Britain. The cartoon is a play on the story of the three pigs and their three houses. Houston is saving Britain by building a sturdy brick wall to keep out the big bad wolf. The wolf is a caricature of Ramsay MacDonald, with a small lamb's hide on his back, suggesting the cliché "wolf in lamb's clothing." On his back is the name "Lambsey." Behind them, representatives from the Liberal and Conservative parties scratch their heads as their flimsy straw and wooden houses fall down around them. Meanwhile, Lady Houston (made to look young and beautiful), sets another brick in place in her unbreachable wall and points her trowel, asking Lambsey, "Who's for England? You or Me?" The cartoon conveys another interesting message about withdrawal. Planks that lean against the wall she is constructing, read "British Material," reflecting that other preoccupation of the extreme

right, economic self-sufficiency and imperial autarky. The metaphorical walls were to be made from modernized defensive and offensive weapons, but also through economic insulation.

Yet another example comes from the pages of *Action*. In this cartoon, a set of tiny, baffled British politicians stand helpless in front of an enormous wall. Three of the top-hatted figures are labeled as the three parties, Labour, Liberal, and Conservative. The fourth figure would appear to be Ramsey MacDonald, pointing his umbrella accusingly at the wall. The group have been firing a cannon labeled “Cooperative Action,” at the wall, only to have its cannonballs lying uselessly on the ground. The cannon balls are labeled “Foreign Secretaries,” which is clearly a jab at the ineffectiveness of Anthony Eden. The wall itself is shown massively tall and made of strong new steel, with its sections riveted into place. At the front of the wall two towers dominate the scene, with the heads of Mussolini and Hitler glaring sternly ahead, with faces drawn in the modern style, and the symbols of Fascism and Nazism below them. The wall is clearly a symbol of defensive strength and impermeability. It is also clearly a symbol of technological modernity, with its gleaming steel construction, and modern lines. In the face of this technological wonder – and symbol of fascism – Ramsay MacDonald impotently points his umbrella and cries “Irrational!” at the wall. This part of the cartoon engages another of the pro-fascist debates about the rationality or irrationality of fascism. As we have seen fascists and pro-fascists on Britain’s extreme right consistently positioned fascism and themselves as rational and modern. The cartoon is yet another representation of fascism not as spiritual or organic, or as a system that will recapture the past, but as the ultimate in modern rationality and technological superiority. In the far right view, fascism’s befuddled detractors could only cry “irrational!” in the face of its towering techno-rationality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Britain's extreme right wing community assembled a fairly coherent group of beliefs and political objectives during the interwar years. Dissecting these produces an impression of this group not as a "mostly nostalgic, reactionary movement," but instead as one dedicated to its own version of high modernity. They focused much of their discourse and policymaking upon issues of emerging modernity, like highway systems, the air industry, communications, health care and particularly national defense. As they debated these issues, the far right made the case that Britain could be re-ordered through the rational application of scientific principles in government, industry, national infrastructure, and defense. The freedoms associated with liberal-democracy, they emphasized, had allowed science and technology to progress unchecked, leaving in its wake overproduction, unemployment, urban blight, and poverty. A modern world needed a modern governmental system to solve this new set of decidedly modern problems.

In this collective debate they defined their enemies. Generally, they saw Marxism, and more specifically Soviet Union, as the greatest threat to British and European society. The Soviet Union loomed as a potentially violent threat to private property and private enterprise, which, they believed, had to be preserved at all costs. What was worse, the Soviet Union appeared to be using the totalitarian state in its own intensive modernization. But, the British Governments during the 1920's and 30's did not seem to be providing a competent defense against such threats. Rather, a Marxist-inspired Labour Party was gaining ground, representing a threat from within. Meanwhile, the Conservative Party seemed to offer no creative or effective policies to preserve British security or to strengthen the country. Instead, as unemployment continued to soar, export to decline, and infrastructures to weaken, Conservative leaders like Stanley Baldwin

only offered policies of accommodation with Labour or a pledge to do nothing rash – “Safety First.” Dramatic action was needed, said the far right, with the power of the state behind it, and neither Tory Conservatism nor Labour was delivering. Thus, the “old gang” of Britain’s three political parties, and the parliamentary system itself, represented another of its great enemies.

Finally, they included “international finance” among their greatest enemies. The extreme right was convinced that industry and government had come to be dominated and undermined by finance capital. The investors of the City sought the highest returns by investing in Britain’s industrial competitors. This especially applied to Asia, where “sweated slave labor” could always be cheaper than British production. The “gentlemanly capitalists” of the financial community had also come to exert their influence and leverage upon those in government. The net result was a perverted system, where Britain’s own financial community was enriching itself through the gradual destruction of the British economy as a whole. British fascists and pro-fascists were just as convinced that it was Jews who dominated “international finance,” and so it was little wonder that the financial community had no concern for issues of national welfare. The Jews, they believed, were a nation unto themselves – a nation within a nation – and therefore cared nothing for the national welfare, but only their own. The power of Jewish finance, said the far right, had to be eliminated in order to protect and strengthen those who actually produced.

The extreme right also identified its allies. On the continent the extreme right was greatly impressed by the radical action of Benito Mussolini, and later Adolf Hitler and Francisco Franco. Each had dealt with the Marxist threat with the kind of decisive action (read illegal violence) that the extreme right deemed necessary under the circumstances. Having forced their way into power, the dictators set about re-ordering their nations through the radical application of what the extreme right saw as “scientific” practices. Through an authoritarian high modernist program,

the fascist nations had supposedly eliminated government inaction and even the class war. These were nations now ready to take their place among the new generation of great powers. Britain, the most powerful nation in the world for over a century, seemed to be lagging behind. The extreme right then identified the fascist powers as candidates for political alliance and as examples for Britain to follow. As such, its political rhetoric was filled with fascist inspired solutions and support for the dictatorships.

Looking across the extreme right community, as we did in Chapters One and Two, there was a clear connection between the extreme right and the industrial, high-tech community of the “new industries.” Among the key figures of the far right there were a disproportionate number of those involved in mass production industries, aircraft research, the automotive community, and radio communications. This says more than simply that British pro-fascism included a number of auto or air enthusiasts. The great majority of the figures examined in Chapters One and Two, while being important engineers, airmen, or proponents of technology, were also critical in shaping the extreme right agenda. They owned or edited extreme right press outlets; some were prolific writers and correspondents; some were the key funders or founders of extreme right political organizations; some wielded great influence by virtue of their celebrity. So, many of the principle voices of the extreme right were heavily involved in the world of technological modernity.

In the examination of these extreme right figures some significant sub-themes come to the surface. The first of these regards class affiliations. Debate has gone on for decades as to prevailing class associations with fascism. The early Marxist interpretation saw fascism as the political tool of big capital. Faced with a swelling revolution of workers, big capital had resorted to employing political regimes of terror to de-claw and finally enslave the workers. Others see

fascism chiefly as an expression of the lower middle classes, squeezed between the revolutionary workers from below and by large scale manufacturers (big capital) from above. This view is especially prominent in analyses of the rise of Nazism in Germany, where a deep strain of “popular anti-modernism” grew steadily amongst that nation’s *mittelstand*, and did certainly provide a key base for Hitler’s rise to power. In this study, most of the key fascist and pro-fascist figures had lower middle class roots. The most prominent voices of the extreme right included a number of impressive titles like Lord Rothermere, Lady Houston, Sir A. V. Roe, or Sir Malcolm Campbell. But, as we have seen, while a few came from aristocratic backgrounds, most of those figures were of quite humble origins and had worked themselves into positions of prominence. They very often carried with them middle class convictions about hard work, preservation of property, and a suspicion of aristocratic privilege.

Connected with this we see a number of extreme right figures out of place in the “gentlemanly” culture of British business. From Lord Nuffield to Lord Rothermere, to Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, to Peter Eckersley, we have seen individuals exasperated by elitism. They often wrote of their frustration with the Oxbridge class of corporate executives, who were more concerned with cordial social relations than in the technical details of their own products. When innovation was demanded, then, the Oxbridge types were ambivalent and the supposed technical visionaries, like Fuller or Eckersley were dismissed as unseemly or as cranks. Finding themselves outsiders in their own fields, it is perhaps no surprise that they were attracted to outsider’s politics – a political movement that aspired to wipe away the “old gang.”

That urge to eliminate what stood in their way found itself expressed in other forms as well. For the extreme right community was also filled with individuals who were driven to go further, faster, and higher. As we have seen, Lady Houston financed the building and flying of the plane

that won the Schneider Cup, setting several speed records. She also financed the project of her far right friend, Lord Clydesdale, to fly over Mount Everest smashing the high altitude marks and, as she believed, demonstrating to Indians that Britain was still “top dog.” Sir Malcolm Campbell set and broke numerous land speed records in his famous “Bluebird” car becoming a national icon. Later he broke the water speed records as well. There is a connection here with the pro-fascist belief in decisive action and the exasperation with the supposedly obsolete liberal-democratic system. Though the connection was never stated explicitly, the far right discussed the power of high technology in the same terms it described the power of authoritarian government. Technology was powerful and lethal – it carried with it the force to sweep away the old (like speed records or older models) and power its way to new heights.

Technology and engineering also helped persuade members of the far right that the fascist powers had found the appropriate system for the modern world. In Chapter Three we saw how the modernist achievements of Italy and Germany took a quite prominent place in the pro-fascist discourse of the time. Many British travelers visited the dictatorships and came away believing they had seen the future – and it worked. This was documented in a great number of personal memoirs, travel logs, and political tracts. In these works the authors were clearly awed by the impressive new works of high technology and infrastructures. They wrote at length of the 100 mph trains of Germany and the new levels of efficiency they could bring. They wrote of the astounding ocean liners being built in Italy and Germany. They wrote of the modern architecture, the cleanliness of the cities, and the seeming contentment of a newly satisfied populace. Air tours lent a particularly modern twist to their visits, with British authors amazed at the quality of aviation research, the modern airports, and the efficiency of high speed air travel. We can see here a warning as to the power of technology and engineering to influence opinion.

This was something the left understood well and men like Robert Brady warned that the Nazis used such things to “put across to foreigners,” and that they could “make their position *seem* ultra-modern.” Bridges, skyscrapers, clean factories, and highways have persuasive power. They appear to be embodiments of efficiency, competency, and state efficacy. Sometimes they are.

But, of course, these things can be deceiving. In Italy, for example, the community of Littoria, built on the old Pontine Marshes, covered up a bungled construction effort which resulted in the death of hundreds of workers. With a clean, orderly community in its place Mussolini abandoned malaria research, which was badly needed, especially in the South. Likewise, the Nazi Labor Front appeared to British far right visitors as a new and ingenious formula for protecting the interests of industrial workers, thus eradicating class conflict. But, as the work of Tim Mason has shown, it was a department without a clear mission, did little for workers, and generally had no authority to confront large employers. In fact, the German Labor Front did little for German labor in material terms and failed utterly in its mission to help indoctrinate German workers in the Nazi principles of total national unity. Such examples help us to see that quite often the modern appearances of fascist projects actually disguised fascist inefficiency and brutality. Britain’s pro-fascist authors failed to see past the mortar or steel. And so an overwrought Mosley, visiting the Pontine housing project, could write “Fascism is destined to be the universal system of the twentieth century...it shall bring Europe a new civilization!”

Such concrete examples provided British pro-fascists with what they considered tangible evidence of the power and effectiveness of fascism to solve the problems of the modern world. Many on the far right compared what they saw in the dictatorships with conditions at home and found Britain wanting. Thus, they seized upon several of the issues of technological modernity

as key battlefields for attacking the government and the entire democratic system. They referred time and again to the poorly coordinated efforts of Britain's liberal-democracy in creating efficient infrastructure. The roads were a key argument here. Germany had created the *autobahn* and Italy its *autostrada* through a single vision straight from the nation's leader, who employed state officials to execute a coordinated plan on a national scale. After they were complete, state administered crews worked to maintain those highways. In Britain, though, road building had been an ad hoc affair. Certain towns and companies built small pieces at a time, with no master plan for a national system – the problem of the “ribbon roads.” This was a vivid example, according to the far right, of the failure and the obsolescence of democracy. The parliamentary system created individuals skilled in the arts of debate, coalition building, and avoiding radical change. They were in no way trained for the technical demands of building a modern nation. Fascism, on the other hand, planned on a national scale and –this was key – brought technicians into the government, through the corporate system. These men and women would have the knowledge and experience to deal with the issues presented by modern science and engineering and could see projects through to efficient completion. When grand, national projects, like Rothermere's dream of a great Channel tunnel, were proposed, the factions and interests represented in a democracy could defeat them. Authoritarian government would have no such difficulties.

The formula within far right discourse of using fascist accomplishments as ammunition in the attack on Britain's democracy was given special treatment in Chapter Five in the area of national defense. On this subject the far right was at its most strident and vocal. J.F.C. Fuller, for example, wrote volumes on the importance of mechanizing Britain's army. In his many books and articles for various far right publications he expressed his anger and frustration at the

political and military leaders who could not see the value of re-engineering the forces. Fuller, a man who had been involved in the development of tank warfare from its earliest days, desperately called for infantry to be replaced by tanks. Machines on the field, he insisted, were the military expression of modernism, while clashes of legions of human troops were the outdated expression of mass democracy. Although this seemed obvious to him, he fumed about the “old gang” military leaders who resisted mechanization and berated the politicians who, lacking any military experience, remained convinced “of the importance of cavalry in modern warfare.” A similar written campaign was led by Admiral Sir Barry Domvile (founder of the Link) about modernizing Britain’s fleet and building a great canal between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth. Another was led by Lord Rothermere through his *Daily Mail*, which made a desperate plea for Britain to modernize and expand its Air Force. His repeated editorials like “We Need 5,000 War Planes!” and “What the Next War will be Like,” drove home the point that Britain was well behind its world competitors and so quite vulnerable to attack. Only a modernized military based upon the very latest technology could save Britain in such an unstable environment. Rothermere didn’t stop there, leading the design of a high-speed bomber, the “Britain First” (later the Blenheim) and founding the National League of Airmen.

Britain could not count on the good will of other nations in its naïve pursuit of multi-lateral disarmament. This was, to the far right, the pipe-dream of parliamentary politicians and leftists who were incapable of looking at the world with a coldly rational eye. Believing themselves to be uniquely capable of such a “rational” view, far right commentators made the point that Britain must align itself with its natural allies in the new generation of Great Powers. These were surely the fascist dictatorships. But, beyond being candidates for alliance, the dictatorships were also examples for Britain. As the 1930’s pressed on, the fascist powers loomed as possible threats,

but this did not change the far right's respect for their methods. The extreme right world view, which comes out quite clearly in this particular debate, saw all nations as potentially violent and aggressive. Only those nations which were lethally armed and secure, then, would be worthy of a "grudging respect," and be in position for productive diplomacy and alliance. Yes, the fascist powers loomed as a dangerous threat, but they would only remain dangerous if Britain remained weak. The nation needed the most modern tools of deterrence, said the extreme right, not fanciful disarmament conferences.

The concept of the tools of deterrence connected strongly with another of the extreme right's most cherished objectives. They believed intensely that the nation must become self-sufficient and insulated from world chaos or foreign attack. This over-arching belief I refer to as "exclusive nationalism." It was perhaps the most salient of all the extreme right objectives and it expressed itself in a number of ways. Not surprisingly, they consistently looked to science and technology as the means for bringing these objectives to reality.

The first of the expressions of "exclusive nationalism," regarded the fear of foreign elements. This manifested itself in the form of racism, anti-Semitism and a general anti-alienism. Here, however, extreme right discourse was inconsistent. There were groups on the extreme right devoted almost entirely to racial purity and anti-Semitism, but these were a small splinter minority and produced little in the way of political debate. The BUF put forth a conflicted message on racism, at first adamantly proclaiming its rejection of Nazi-style anti-alienism, but later turning to an aggressive anti-Semitism. Other members of the extreme right, however, were mostly silent on matters of race, at least in print, whatever their private convictions. Still, there were ubiquitous calls in all areas of the far right press for "Britain for the British," or "British goods on British Ships!" or "Britain First," or warning of the "Alien Menace." This became

complicated when applied to the British Empire. Mosley had early on made the point that racism was unproductive in an Empire full of diverse peoples that needed to come together into a self-contained whole. Generally, the far right asserted that the Empire should become “One Great Family,” but this applied only to the white populations of the Dominions. It was tacitly assumed that the “coloured races” of the Empire would remain children in that “Great Family.” The extreme right believed that modern technology was crucial in creating such an imperial family. They violently protested the gradual loss of imperial control and said that the British should be concerned with consolidating its Empire rather than granting autonomy. They wrote consistently about the power of radio communications to simultaneously broadcast throughout the Empire, or the need for expanded imperial air routes for mail, cargo and passengers. Knit together by transportation technologies and infrastructure, the Empire could be preserved and united. Technology could be used for other purposes in that great project, though. Lady Houston, for example, was determined that the air expeditions she funded to fly over Mount Everest would amaze the supposedly primitive Indians, drive home the message of British superiority, and undermine thoughts of autonomy or independence.

An Empire preserved and united was critical if another expression of exclusive nationalism was to be achieved. This was economic self-sufficiency. Mosley’s BUF was the most vocal about this objective, and laid out the most thorough program for its operation. But, virtually all areas of the extreme right shared this dream of eliminating Britain’s dependency in an uncertain world. Britain would do its best to produce as much food and raw materials as possible, but obviously the small island had its limitations. Imperial produce would be necessary for the system to work. In exchange, Imperial imports would receive preferential status and non-Empire goods would be excluded outright, wherever possible. It was a radicalized version of the

Imperial Preference championed by Joseph Chamberlain and later picked up by L. S. Amery, and then Lord Beaverbrook and Rothermere as they launched their failed United Empire Party. This obsession with self-sufficiency was the driving motivation behind the far right groups' preoccupation with renewing British agriculture. In virtually every far right press outlet there were alarmist calls warning that Britain had lost its ability to feed itself and how this would bring disaster if conflict arose. Thus, as addressed in Chapter One, most (though admittedly not all) of the extreme right focus on agriculture was concerned with *modernized* farming, taking advantage of mechanization and scientific research to maximize efficiency of production.

Weaning Britain off of non-imperial food suppliers was one priority. The issue of fuel was another. Extreme right publications were pumped full of anger about Britain's dependency on foreign oil. The answer, said many on the far right, was British coal. Early advocates suggested refitting British ships for coal, which would begin to solve the dependency problem and help alleviate the ongoing coal crisis at home. Miners could be put back to work, at potentially higher wages, with a renewal in demand. But, the debate moved on to suggest that the British should channel resources into "coal gasification," which through scientific processes would convert coal to petroleum. It solved the same problems through a cleaner and more efficient technology. On this subject, far right advocates worried about the inertia of government and the tradition-bound general public. Would they really be able to stop shoveling coal into their furnaces? Again, the far right looked to the fascist powers as inspirational examples. Their powerful governments had made autarky their nation's most pressing national economic objective. Their scientists and industrialists had developed a remarkable number of substitutes for raw materials like rubber, oils, fats, and metals. Understanding the urgency of such measures, the populations of Italy and Germany embraced the challenges of autarky and supported such initiatives.

Finally, national defense was the most important of all the far right initiatives concerning national insulation. They called for mechanized ground forces, for the re-design of the Navy's fleets with faster ships and submarines, and for the development of more lethal bombing planes. They also praised the efforts of France in creating the Maginot Line, a long line of armed forts running right along the German border; the ultimate expression of technological insulation. This assembly of policies to seal Britain off from "world chaos" often expressed itself in a language of imagery that permeates extreme right discourse. Throughout the far right press, there are constant references to barriers against outside aggressors such as walls, fences, moats, and shields. The extreme right's dreams of imperial consolidation, racial purity at home, economic self-sufficiency and military deterrence were then portrayed in a number of images that brought home their obsession with insularity. These included depictions of Hitler behind a castle battlement, the dictators embodied in a solid steel wall, and Lady Houston building a wall around Britain – a wall made from "British Materials."

It can be tempting to focus on some of the ideas and warnings of the extreme right as being quite prescient. War did come to Britain from outside aggressors. Britain's re-armament was adequate, but the nation had a great deal of catching up to do through 1939-40. When the Germans set out to conquer Europe they did so with a corps of tanks and highly mechanized forces. Had the extreme right been correct on the question of rearmament? If we look a bit closer, we will find that many of the extreme right wing campaigns were misguided or altogether wrong. Their rabid anti-Semitism and anti-alienism was clearly inexcusable for obvious reasons of human decency. Any human being who respects the life and freedom of other human beings can see that. But, some of their more practical sounding campaigns proved incorrect as well. Fuller's tank campaign was ignored because it suggested *replacing* infantry with tanks, rather

than using them in coordination with infantry. Domvile's campaign for speedy cruisers turned out to be well off base as air craft carriers dominated naval warfare in the Second World War. Eckersley's design for a cable based radio system would have been ridiculously expensive when wireless could provide the very same services. Alliances with Germany and Italy were exposed as ridiculous by the late 1930's as far right writers like Sir Malcolm Campbell came to admit. The nation, he said, should have nurtured relations with the United States not the untrustworthy dictatorships.

The extreme right was indeed fundamentally wrong about its most indicting accusations as well, according to David Edgerton. The interwar Governments of the "liberal internationalists" did *not* in fact disarm the nation. Nor was defense based industry technically antiquated and neglected by the state. In Warfare State, Edgerton examines the British investment in a science-based military research and production effort that was as powerful as any on earth. In terms of the Royal Navy, for example, he writes

The Royal Navy out-built all other navies in nearly all periods of the interwar years and in nearly all classes of warship. In terms of overall tonnage of warships completed between 1928 and 1941 the Royal Navy achieved, in round figures, 1 million tons while the United States managed 700,000 tons and the Japanese around 600,000 tons.⁴³⁷

He finds similar strength in aviation and land arms, saying that "in air armament it was as strong as any other country...in land arms, though weaker, it showed a strong predilection for technological means." Further, these achievements were driven by scientific research organizations and technocratic government departments. In fact, "the British armed services had a technical infrastructure and research and development (R&D) laboratories of huge size by the standards of the period." Despite the genuine panic of the extreme right's interwar campaigns, "The idea that Britain had unilaterally disarmed in the 1920's and 1930's, so assiduously

⁴³⁷ Edgerton, Warfare State, p. 32.

repeated and ingeniously defended, is clearly untenable...Britain was not a military-technological superpower in the interwar years for there was then no such thing; but it could claim to be the most powerful of the great powers.”⁴³⁸

Despite this, the core of the interwar far right attacks upon the liberal democratic system focused upon Britain’s decline since the Great War. Marxists, unqualified liberal politicians, and “international finance,” (read Jews) had, they believed, driven the nation into decline and peril. The extreme right’s distance from power surely contributed to the intensity of their attacks. To eliminate, or at least dramatically reform, liberal democracy in the very birthplace of modern representative government was an enormous challenge. To even hope to accomplish it, the far right needed to convince the mass of public opinion that Britain’s current system was dangerously inadequate. They also needed to convince the public that their own failures (promotion of autarky and closed markets, advocacy of mechanized ground forces, advocacy of fleet redesign, advocacy of a channel tunnel etc.) were not the result of their own poor judgment and impracticability. They blamed those failures instead upon the supposedly anti-scientific, anachronistic leaders who had no conception of modern requirements. This same pattern of attack was deployed by others in the right wing technological community in the post war era, such as the famous Barnes Wallis, adding to the body of declinist opinion.⁴³⁹

So, declinism has been deployed then by both left and right to persuade us that Britain’s liberal democracy and its leaders failed in the twentieth century. This failure, say declinists, manifested itself especially in the form of stunted technological innovation, outdated industrial methods, and as a result, a serious decline in Britain’s geopolitical power. The broad outlines of

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴³⁹ See Waqar Zaidi, “The Janus Face of Techno-Nationalism: Barnes Wallis and the ‘Strength of England’” *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 49, 2008, pp. 62-88.

that declinist critique can be traced back to the collective discourse of Britain's interwar extreme right. The disproportionate power of finance, the ineffectiveness of liberalism for national initiatives, an unqualified and anachronistic leadership class, failure to promote and fund science and technology – all of these notions appeared in the interwar campaigns of Britain's fascists and pro-fascists. The interwar far right takes its place within a wider tradition of declinist attack, but it was certainly the most extreme advocate of this message. Members of the extreme right deployed this criticism, in its most extreme form, in order to convince others of the desperate need for their own alternative vision of modernity. But, as the preceding pages have shown, this political tendency was seriously misguided on a number of issues and it seems certain that Britain would have declined further and faster, had the extreme right gained any measure of state control.

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