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Philipps Universität Marburg

The Lure of Fascism?

Extremist Ideology in the Newspaper *Reality* Before WWII

JOHN RICHARDSON

Although a great deal of research has been published examining British fascism during the 1930s, the vast majority of this work, perhaps necessarily, has focused on various party literatures as the definitive voices of the political parties. Aside from the infamous support that Rothermere and the *Daily Mail* provided the British Union of Fascists, thus far, there has been comparatively little examination of the circulation of totalitarian ideologies in the wider national culture.[1] Even the current 'cultural turn' in fascist studies tends to focus analytic attention on the officially ratified outputs of explicitly named fascist parties (see: Gottlieb and Linehan, 2004). Inevitably, I would argue, this impoverishes our understanding of fascism—of its origins, its growth, its success, and the potentials for its recurrence. In relation to the British fascist tradition, "it is impossible to understand organised hostility to minority groups without reference to wider cultural traditions in British society" (Kushner and Lunn 1989: 5). And these cultural traditions need not be an epoch's 'big hitters' and 'leading lights". Indeed, we could make a case that all "cultural epochs depend on their backstage staff as much as their top billers and it is often the lesser lights who contribute more fully to an era's Zeitgeist" (Bradshaw 2004: 145). This is because cultural and political 'leading lights' are, necessarily, in some sense extraordinary; for an

1 | Notable exceptions are Pugh (2006) and Stone (2003), though Stone's work focuses on British responses to Nazism from 1933, while the present chapter examines texts published at the end of 1932.

examination of the cultural and political assumptions of an epoch, it is sometimes a good idea to try to seek out the sources that have somehow fallen into the background. The newspaper *Reality* is exactly such a source.

Britain
Cultural and Political Contexts

Like Stone (2002: 2), I am concerned to "challenge the view [...] which dismisses British fascism as a pale imitation of continental counterparts, and as an irrelevance in British political history". Part of this re-evaluation of the significance of fascism to British political, and *cultural*, history, lies in showing that British fascism is not a mini-epochal episode, limited to the years immediately prior to the Second World War. In fact, in Britain, there are "well developed indigenous tradition of ways of thinking, which, while they cannot be called 'fascist' [...] can certainly be called 'proto-fascist"' (Stone 2002: 2). For around forty years before the First World War "the ideas that prepared the ground for fascism were abundantly in evidence in British politics and society; like other European countries Britain had a pre-fascist tradition" (Pugh 2006: 7). Mirroring fascist movements on mainland Europe, this British pre-fascist tradition developed from movements of the radical right, and drew their strength from sections of the British establishment. Largely a loose coalition of middle and upper class ultra-conservatives, the beliefs of the Edwardian radical right were shaped by a particular interpretation of the 'national interest'. They were angered by the erosion of aristocratic government (and the enactment of the 1911 Parliament Act in particular), dismayed by a widespread sense of Imperial decline (and a corresponding desire to strengthen British Imperial power) and horrified by increasing working class activism and enfranchisement. More specifically, "most of them supported tariff reform, compulsory military service, an expansion of the army and navy [...] an end to 'alien' immigration and armed resistance to Home Rule in Ireland" (Thurlow 2006: 4). For many on the right, motivated as it ostensibly was by "the aim of restoring a sense of community, nationhood, kingship and hereditary leadership, fascism presented itself as a return to English traditions, not as an alien innovation" (Pugh 2006: 10).

In fact an opposition to 'alien influence' in British life was a central rallying call of the British radical right from the beginnings of the Twen-

tieth Century. 1901 saw the formation of The British Brothers League (BBL), a 'muscular Christian' organization which, for the next 5 years, conducted a very successful agitation against Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe. At its height, the organization had a membership of around 12,000, and presented a 45,000 signature petition to parliament in 1902 demanding an end to immigration (Cohen 2006). Like later fascist parties, the stronghold of the BBL was in the East of London, and they organised large public meetings and demonstrations across Stepney, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. At one meeting in January 1902, over 4,000 supporters marched through Hackney, then a significant Jewish community, holding a banner reading 'Britain for the British' and accompanied by the beating of drums (Cohen 2006: 28). And, in case the antisemitism of their provocation and intimidation were not immediately apparent, speakers at the rally detailed an early version of the antisemitic 'Jewish world conspiracy theory" for the crowd: Arnold White, a central member of the BBL, railed against "these great European financiers [who] hold the fate of nations in the hollow of their hands and are unanimously against any country" (Cohen 2006: 28).

The political lobbying of the BBL led eventually to the implementation of the 1905 Aliens Act, the first piece of undeniably racist British legislation, which based this racism on an economically based discourse in support of native employment. This legislative success effectively pulled the plug on the BBL, and membership took a steep decline. However radical right agitation, in general, was in no way shrinking at this time. By 1909, the Anti-Socialist Union was one of a whole slew of radical rightist organisations formed to reverse the hard-fought successes secured by the labour movement. Immediately before, during and following the First World War, additional 'patriotic' radical right groups were formed, such as the National League for Clean Government, Henry Page Croft's National Party and H. Rider Haggard's anti-Bolshevik, Liberty League. By far the most significant of these was The Britons, formed in 1918 by Henry Hamilton Beamish as a 'patriotic' organisation dedicated to the eradication of 'alien'—that is, Jewish—influences from British life. From 1922 The Britons acted as a publisher and clearing house for various antisemitic books, such as *The Protocols*, and pamphlets including *Jewry Über Alles* and *The Hidden Hand*, as did the Duke of Northumberland's Boswell Press, which published the newspaper *The Patriot* from 1922 to 1950.

Following the First World War, explicitly named fascist parties took up the fight for "restrictions on 'alien' immigration, by which they usually

meant Jewish immigration" (Lunn 1989: 150), with the British Fascists using the slogan 'Britain for the British' in their 1925 Manifesto. Eventually, with the formation of the British Union of Fascists, launched in October 1932 by Sir Oswald Mosley, Britain acquired a "mature form of Fascist phenomenon" (Thurlow 1989: 92). In keeping with the standard duplicitous campaign strategy adopted by fascists elsewhere (c.f. Mannheim 1960), Thurlow (2006: 62) argues that "from the beginning the BUF exhibited a Janus-faced appearance: it was a movement which was intellectually the most coherent and rational of all the fascist parties in Europe in its early years, yet whose aggressive style and vigorous self-defence attracted political violence". It was a party that spoke, and acted, in different ways according to who was being addressed: to the left, Mosley emphasised the 'revolutionary' features of BUF political programme, whilst to the right he emphasised authority, order and stability. Political-philosophical arguments were employed to woo intellectual recruits, whilst for Mosley's 'Biff Boys', it was "the excitement and potential violence which the BUF seemed to offer which proved the biggest recruiting spur" (Thurlow 2006: 67).

By the end of 1934 the BUF had consolidated a leadership cult centred on a charismatic orator; a political programme that adopted the 'corporate state' as its core economic policy; a paramilitary 'defence' force who wore a blackshirt uniform and were billeted and trained at Black House, at up to 200 men at a time; and employed extreme antisemitic propaganda and violent agitation against Jewish businesses and communities (Linehan 2000; Renton 1999; Williams 2007). In these ways, the BUF exhibited many of the classic characteristics of an 'authentic' fascist party. Coupled with the substantial financial support received from Mussolini (Baldoli 2003; Pugh 2006), the scale and professionalism of party propaganda and the, at points, large number of party members, the BUF was arguably the only fascist organisation "with any pretention to significance in inter-war Britain" (Thurlow 2006: 61). However, as Pugh (2006: 73) reminds us:

> "Although none of them achieved a very large following, the emergence of the British Fascists [in 1923] the National Fascisti [in 1924], the Imperial Fascist League [in 1928] and the English Mistery [in 1930] reminds us that, well before the emergence of Mosley's much better-known organisation in 1932, Britain had already generated an extensive range of experiments with fascist movements".

Accordingly, Mosley should be viewed as the inheritor of an older reactionary tradition in British politics, which he repackaged and 'rebranded'

as a 'modern movement'. The sample of *Reality* examined in this chapter was published immediately prior to, and concurrent with, this rebranding of British political reaction.

Reality
The Newspaper

Reality was printed by Nuneaton Newspapers LTD, for the proprietors Richard Edmunds and R. H. Linton. Only the first 20 issues of the newspaper appear to be extant—the first published on Saturday July 2nd, 1932, running through to November 12th, 1932.[2] Any reliable information regarding the ownership and production of the newspaper has been impossible to come by: there is no record of the newspaper in Companies House, West Midlands Newsplan, or Willing's Press Guide, nor are there entries for the proprietors in the biographical database of British journalism, *Scoop!* The same is the case for the newspaper's sale, distribution and circulation—though, if the addresses on the letters to the editor can be believed, *Reality* appears to have been distributed both across the United Kingdom as well as in the Imperial Dominions. The reporting themes and foci of the newspaper are squarely fixed on national and international issues and events, particularly issues relating to the British Empire. However, this chapter will concentrate on its reporting of domestic politics. It is a professionally produced newspaper—there are only a handful of typographical errors across the 20 issues; it includes work from a number of correspondents, several of whom have a weekly column, a cartoonist and two reviews editors (theatre and books), all suggesting that it was a well resourced publication. In addition *Reality* almost definitely employed a production designer, given the development of an increasingly sophisticated design aesthetic across the 5 months.

This chapter's synoptic examination of *Reality*, picks out key ideological and argumentative themes that relate to the development of the British fascist tradition and its relations to wider cultural and political contexts. However, it should be noted at the outset that *Reality* never labelled itself as 'fascist'—quite the contrary. On several occasions, articles and editorials in the paper explicitly stated that the paper wasn't aligned with any particular party or ideology. Of course, as the work of Billig (1978) and others have shown, this does mean that it *wasn't* fascist (see also: Copsey 2007, 2008; Nugent and King 1979; Richardson

2 | The British Library at Colindale also has only these same 20 Issues in its archive (1932 LON 786; catalogue system number 013934956).

2010; Richardson and Wodak 2009; Taylor 1979). However it does pose a problem in *identifying* themes or arguments as 'fascist', or even 'proto-fascist'. This is because, as Renton (1999: 27) has noted, "many of the [ideological] ideas that characterise fascism are not in themselves distinctive". Indeed, "Many of the ideas of fascism are the commonplaces of all reactionaries, but they are used in a different way" (Sparks, 1974: 16). As Billig (1978: 6) points out:

> "It is possible to be a racist or an antisemite without necessarily being fascist [...] Similarly, fascism is not to be equated with traditionalism or arch-conservatism. Conservatives might support fascist movements in the hope that a new fascist state would be a reincarnation of past ideals. However, traditionalism is neither a sufficient, or necessary, condition of fascism".

Rather, fascism differs from the traditionalism or conservatism of conventional right-wing parties "not so much in its ideas but in that it is an extra-parliamentary mass movement which seeks the road to power through armed attacks on its opponents" (Sparks 1974: 16). It is this extra-parliamentary, or paramilitary, character of the fascist movement that fascist ideologues have traditionally been careful of acknowledging in print, and this is perhaps particularly the case for British variant, even during the 1920s and 30s (Thurlow 2006). However, there is some evidence, in the sample of the newspaper, of *implicit support* for violent attacks on the political opponents of fascist regimes abroad—principally on Communists—through the ways that such attacks are practically euphemised out of existence. There are also some examples of writers in *Reality* fantasising about, or *proposing*, that such attacks be emulated on British soil. Such ambitions locate the ideological commitments of the writers beyond the pale of (even radical) democratic political tradition and, when coupled with further political assumptions and goals (c.f. nationalism, anti-egalitarianism, anti-Marxism, statism and support for the maintenance of capitalism), implicitly ally the text to a fascist political programme. Accordingly, the following examination of newspaper *Reality* is structured across three sections:

- texts which indicate an ideological commitment to radical right-wing politics;
- texts which reveal 'proto-fascist' ideological sympathies;
- texts which imply fascist sympathies.

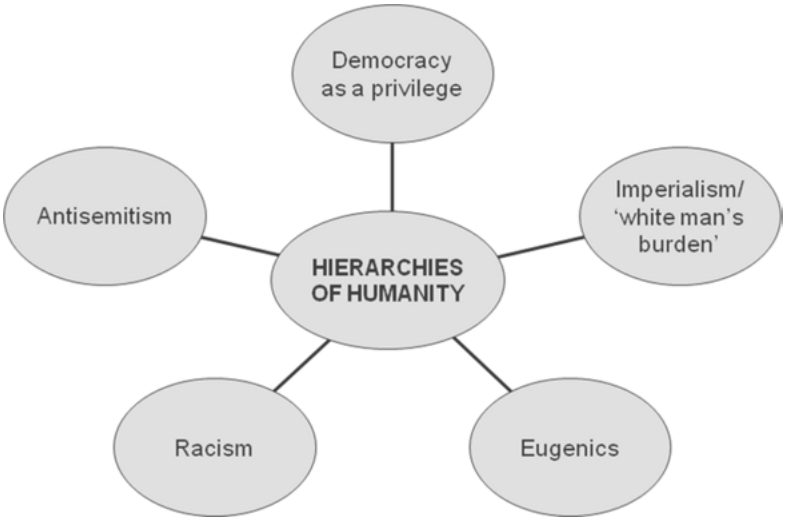
The distinction between proto-fascism and fascism proper is often difficult to draw. To an extent, the whole notion of a proto-fascism is based on 'foreshadowing', an analytic failing in which the past is read from the standpoint of what followed (Bernstein 1994; also see: Stone 2003). After all, what is typically assumed to make an idea, argument or movement 'proto-fascist' rather than 'simply' radical right-wing, is that this idea (and so on) provided the ideological groundwork for a subsequent fascist movement. Here, I use the term slightly differently: a text was taken to indicate an ideological commitment to radical right-wing politics if it included *a constellation of ideas or arguments* typical of such a movement at this time. Thus, a commitment to eugenics may not, in and of itself, be sufficient to ally the writer to radical right-wing politics; however, a commitment to eugenics and Imperialism, or eugenics *and* a rigid adherence to class hierarchy, invariably would (see: Stone 2001). On the other hand, a text was considered to reveal 'proto-fascist' ideological sympathies if it advocated *policies*, and not simply ideas, typical of fascist parties (e.g. the corporative state), but did so within the bounds of democratic discourse. Finally, a text was considered to indicate fascist sympathies if it advanced either ideas or arguments typical of fascist argumentation, or advocated policies typical of fascist parties, and did so in such a way that entailed violence or a direct threat to democracy and personal freedom.

Radical Right-Wing

Radical right-wing ideological texts in *Reality* were dominated by a constellation of themes which branched off a central belief, and argument, for the inequality of humans. In other words, they presupposed, or explicitly advanced, arguments that a hierarchy exists which innately places some human groups above others, thereby granting the 'superior humans' a hereditary right to rule. From that key bedrock assumption, there are further more detailed and specific arguments: that some peoples are too stupid to be allowed to govern themselves, or even to vote; support for Imperialism and for the British Empire as a civilising project; a belief in biological heredity and a support for eugenics (and what we could euphemistically call 'selective breeding'); for racism, of both the cultural and biological kinds; and for antisemitism.

Each of the newspaper's bedrock radical right themes were expressed and discussed in a variety of ways, often combining two or more ar-

Figure 1: Radical right-wing ideological themes



guments. Some of the more striking arguments are, understandably, the more extreme examples. For instance, Issue 7 (August 13th, 1932) includes a remarkably racist article on Australian Aboriginal cannibals, whom the text refers to as *Australia's most primitive savages*. First, in an implicit indexing of the policy of the lost generation, this article suggests that such Aboriginal children should be taken from their parents for their own protection. And, in case the eugenicist aims of this are missed, the text ends by stating that there is "no hope for the 'abo' in European civilisation. Only with the total disappearance of the race will such ghastly horrors die out". However, the presuppositions in the more throw-away comments are no less revealing. For example, the 'Books of the Week' feature in Issue 17 (October 22nd, 1932) includes a review of Evelyn Waugh's book 'Black Mischief', which the reviewer describes as "a brilliant show up of the British weakness for teaching backward coloured races how to govern themselves".

The argumentation included in domestic reporting also reveals the arch-conservatism of the newspaper, at a time when political elites were still reeling following the enfranchisement of millions of working class and female voters in 1918, and had woken up "to the realisation that [their] grip on power had suddenly become greatly imperilled" (Pugh 2006: 30). Pugh (2006: 30) points out that, for conservative critics and

commentators, this new electorate—now totalling over 21 million, up from merely 8 million before the war—"posed a threat by virtue of the social class, gender and even age of the new voters. [...] They depicted democracy as dangerous and perverse because it handed power to the least able". Such views were not only the preserve of the radical fringe, but also advanced by mainstream and establishment figures. An editorial in Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* (April 7th, 1927), for example, argued "quite a large number of people now possess the vote who ought never have been given it".

The class composition of the new electorate was a matter of particular concern, given the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, economic depression, labour militancy and fears that the British working class were susceptible to Communist influence. In the pages of *Reality*, this fear frequently translated into aggressive negative stereotyping of the working class as feckless, self-interested and "Hoodwinked" by Union leaders so ignorant of the proper workings of the world, that their new-found power had a potentially destabilising influence on the Nation. For example, one front page editorial argued "A situation exists to-day which is definitely dangerous. The murmurings of the multitude can be heard by anyone who has the desire to listen, and these rumblings of discontent can be directly traceable to the underhand methods of unscrupulous agitators" (*The employer and the man*, July 30th, 1932: 1). Another particularly virulent anti-working class article (*Hope for the Welsh Coal Industry*, October 22nd, 1932: 4) employs fantasies of working class opulence and decadent consumption as part of its elitist, anti-union and anti-Marxist argumentation. The report sets up this criticism by first detailing the development of the Welsh coal industry, and that "Local mine owners took pride in the fact that Welsh steam coal was the finest obtainable". Unfortunately, with this success "came the shadow of the Unions"—"Dangerous iconoclasts" imbued "with Karl Marx doctrines". Instead of meeting "*in common with their masters*, the repercussions of trade stagnation" (emphasis added), these Union "leaders merely sought the limelight and were more interested in bringing the world, including the hated bosses, to a common level of poverty rather than of prosperity". The workers, meanwhile, are represented as constituted, predominantly, by the least worthy human beings—the best of the working class having perished in the Great War:

"With their passing, the scum of other industrial areas, who preferred to dig rather than to fight, invaded the fields and displaced those who had left. [...] Money flowed into the homes, but all too often was it expended upon articles of value. [...] Champagne displaced beer as the best form of liquid refreshment, while

many women with surplus pounds in their pockets, in their pathetic uneducated snobbery, covered their perfectly sound teeth with gold".

No doubt a great deal of this vitriol directed towards miners, and coal mining communities more generally, was due to their central role in industrial disputes over the previous ten years—specifically the 'Triple Alliance' of miners, railway and transport workers unions in 1921 and the General Strike in 1926, which brought the country to a standstill, due to solidarity and widespread support from working class communities (Pugh 2006). The strike officially only lasted nine days, however the miners held out for another 6 months, cementing their reputation for provocative industrial action. Disparaging the miners in this way—by casting doubts on their patriotism, accusing them of cowardice and implying they had personally profited from the War—is clearly intended to undermine any lingering sense of sympathy that the reader of *Reality* may feel towards them. Coincidentally, on page 7 of this same issue, there featured an article extolling the virtues of Champagne—a "favourite drink of Popes and Kings", which "still holds its place as one of the most delectable drinks the world knows" (*The Wines of Champagne*, October 22nd, 1932: 7). Drunk by "Byron, Moore and Rogers", "the wit of Sheridan and Curran was often quickened by France's supreme wine", Champagne "is consumed throughout the world". Though if you are a miner in South Wales and you drink it, you should expect to be attacked in print.

Proto-Fascism

Standing between these articles, and those we can more confidently ascribe the label 'fascist', are texts which appear to advance a embryonic argument in favour of a Corporate/Corporative State. In these articles, class distinctions are acknowledged, but only in order to try to demonstrate that both employer and worker share a common interest—the maintenance of capitalism. Industrial relations are also discussed with reference to these two political-economic groups—employer and worker—but in a way that individualises, and reduces the wage relation to that of contract and wage. In the paper's account, the Unions are almost universally cast as a dangerous and undesirable influence on an easily led mass—they are "fanatic", "hysterical" and "aggressive" and a "pernicious influence on the honest but simple-minded man" because

their approach is apparently against the interests of workers (*The employer and the man*, July 30th, 1932: 1). Further, "because of the credulity of their listeners, we must recognise these lizards to be a menace to industrial peace." The foundation of this industrial peace, accordingly, lies not in "fostering class distinction by continually sectionalising Society into WORKERS and BOSSES", but rather in Trade Unions "creating constructive proposals, whereby their members could, by enthusiasm and co-operation, become managerially and financially interested in the undertakings in which they are employed". What is needed, the editorial concludes, is a situation where "employer and employee get together and solve the problem of their own business [...] then we shall see the dawn of a new era, in which BOSSES and WORKERS exist no more, but everyone labours in a cause common to all; that of the betterment of the Nation".

Similarly, the front-page editorial in Issue 9 opens by noting that the on-going Weavers dispute in Lancashire "brings one to sympathise wholeheartedly with the capitalist outlook" (*Wage cuts and dividends*, August 27th, 1932: 1). Despite the cotton industry being "admirably equipped, scientifically and mechanically", the Unions "have attempted to dominate industry, and by so doing have strangled capitalist enterprise". They create "havoc" through their self-interest and lack of foresight—but then this editorial goes on to acknowledge "the other side of the picture". In order to maintain "paying dividends of 15 per cent" during the economic depression, "some firms" cut their "wage bills, amounting often to many thousands of pounds, which amply repays their loss of turnover". This bourgeois understanding of the zero-sum game between wages and profits is illustrated by a cartoon accompanying the text: a fat, Top-Hatted capitalist pictured on one side of the image celebrating a 20 per cent dividend, and a Bowler-Hatted white collar worker on the other holding the notification of his 10 per cent wage cut.

The editorial concludes with a judgment and gentle proposal for change: "It is successful businesses such as these, which enforce wage cuts to keep up dividends, that are a discredit to the Capitalist system. Capital, Labour. On both sides of the fence there is drastic need for reform". So, while vitriol is heaped onto the denunciation of Unions, any similar argumentative strength is lacking when criticising such employers, and certainly not the imperatives of capitalism that structure such unscrupulous profiteering. In fact, while such unprincipled businesses are a "discredit" to the system, they are still described as "successful",

which does raise the question why they would agree to any reform—even reform of the indefinite kind proposed in this article.

Political Antisemitism

Whilst these texts do appear to owe some debt to Fascist political-economic theory, particularly the Italian 'Corporate State', they are not explicitly aligned with or identified as fascist. As suggested earlier in the chapter, antisemitism is also not distinctively fascist. However, political antisemitism—proposing political or economic policy based on antisemitic ideas, arguments or theories — is nevertheless closely allied with British fascism, being a key feature of anti-alien, anti-Bolshevik campaigning since the early 1920s and the central component of the racial fascism of Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League.

Several articles draw, in a casual way, on antisemitic assumptions. For example, a book review of *Leah's Lover*, suggests the plot of the book "Deals with the age old problem of love between a Jew and a Gentile", and that the lead character Leah has a "quick brain and grasp of business, inherited from her Jewish forefathers" (*The best of the books*, July 16th, 1932: 10). Drawing on a similar antisemitic trope, Arthur Harrington wrote an article for Issue 10 on "Schemes of the Moneylender" which, "for the sake of argument", proposed a hypothetical example of "a professional usurer" called Mr Abel who lends Mr Smith money and "sucks the latter dry"; it also claims that dock districts of London, Liverpool and Hull are home to female moneylenders, labelled "the female shylock" (*"Come into my parlour"*, September 3rd 1932: 2). The front-page editorial of Issue 14, (*War and Our Imperial Destiny*, October 1st, 1932: 1) also includes a startling antisemitic aside. The editorial itself is based on two observations and a resolving argument: first, that the League of Nations is dead in the water; second, that war clouds continue to gather in Germany, Italy and Japan; but, thirdly, that English speaking nations can take the place of the League of Nations if "we can extend the spirit of the two minutes silence [of Armistice Day] to our ordinary life and make the horrors of another World war and its inevitable repercussions apparent to all". In this regard, the sentiment, if not the logic, of the editorial is admirable. However, near the bottom of the first column is a section which reads:

> "SEMITIC USURERS
>
> In far off New Zealand is a peace-loving pastoral community striving, in spite of the stranglehold of semitic London usurers, to make of these chaotic post war years a period of prosperity".

Nowhere else does this antisemitic stereotype figure in the article, and even here the stereotype doesn't contribute to the argument about celebrating Armistice Day across the Empire. This, perhaps more than any other article, indicates the extent to which antisemitism, at least to some people, was an everyday, knee-jerk response—an always-present, to be called on in this casual, off hand way.

This antisemitism received a full-page treatment 3 issues later, where the paper decried the *Jewish menace to industry*—the industry, in this case, being furniture production (October 22nd 1932: 1). The essence of the argument is provided near the end of the report: "The Jews are dominating one of our finest industries. They are ruining our great traditions of the past, and turning a great craft solely to commercial gain". In more detail, the author Richard Edmonds argues that the hire purchase system, and the manufacture and marketing of furniture to "those of slender means"

> "[. . .] has presented an opportunity for the very worst types of business men to corner a trade for which neither their mental nor cultural upbringing has ever fitted them. I mean by this the bulk of the Jewish population in the East End of London. Drawn from all over Central Europe, in many instances the very dregs of a race which in other fields can point with pride to its achievements [. . . They are] cut price semites, employers of sweated labour, who make for the Gentile business an economic impossibility. [. . .] Business morality among these people finds no place. A British code of honesty in no way binds them down. Rather it is their advantage".

This text trades on familiar antisemitic *topoi*: the Jews as a 'race', Jews and economic exploitation (particularly the exploitation of Gentiles), Jews and shoddy work, Jews and criminality, and so on, as part of an argument that can only be seen as part of a wider vilification of Jewish communities (predominantly, though not solely, refugees) in London's East End. It also utilises arguments frequently used in contemporary reactionary discourse (and not solely of the far-right): the valorisation of craft production, taking jobs that belong to 'Us', and our tolerance and "code of honesty" being used as weapons against us.

The following issue of the newspaper published four lengthy letters from British Jews complaining about the editorial's antisemitism (*Mr Lazarus wants an apology*, October 29th, 1932: 3). One of these letters argued that Edmonds "obviously suffers from a very severe attack of racial prejudice" whilst another picked up on the intersections of antisemitism and class prejudice in the editorial: "It is not usual for our critics to attack only East End Jewry and refer to these Jews as being a different

people from those who live in the West End [...] Well, sir, if you attack the bulk of the Jewish population of the East End of London, you attack world Jewry—Jews rich and poor—old and young". However, providing Jews (and only Jews) with a right of reply is used by the newspapers as an opportunity to further drive a rhetorical wedge between Jew and Gentile—between what *they* think (and do) and what *we* know:

"[...] many manufacturers both in High Wycombe and London have congratulated us upon the truth of our remarks. From the Jewish element, however, we have received numerous criticisms, all of a somewhat wild nature [...] It is an extraordinary thing that whenever an attack is made on any section of the Jewish community, members of the race invariably rise in defence of what in their own minds they appear to consider as a general indictment against the people as a whole. [...We] regret that Jewish readers should have so distorted in their minds what was after all a perfectly fair and honest criticism".

This argument—printed prior to, and therefore prefacing the letters—shifts *Reality*'s standpoint in a straight-forwardly fallacious way: the original argument was clearly directed against Jewish furniture makers, who, *by virtue of their Jewishness*, were producing poor quality, cheap furniture and pricing English artisan producers out the market. The critical letters did not take the newspaper to task for a fallacious part-for-whole argument, arguing it was unfair to tar all Jewish furniture makers with the brush of a few 'sheisters'; rather, they responded critically to the fallacious (and indeed antisemitic) whole-for-part argument regarding the degenerate *Jewishness* of Jewish furniture makers.

(Sympathising with) Fascism

The British Union of Fascists was launched at the start of October 1932 and, coincidentally perhaps, from Issue 14 (October 1st, 1932—containing the front-page editorial *War and our imperial destiny*, above) there is a noticeable change in the tone and ideological alignment of the paper. Across the sample as a whole there is a subordinate discourse praising the achievements of Italian fascism, however nearer the start of the sample such comments are brief, unelaborated and uttered *sotto voce*. For example, in Issue 4, Mussolini is described as acting with "more than a little sound reasoning". "Perhaps", the article continues, "Signor Mussolini recognises that no lasting good for Italy can come of his domination, unless he trains the men to carry on the work he has so ably

begun". The nature of "the work", and the manner in which it was 'carried out', are notable for their absence. In Issue 7, a hagiography of Signor Dino Grandi (the then-Italian ambassador to London) praises him as "a vigorous fighter of Socialism and Communism"; in contrast these political opponents of fascism are described as "a destructive mob". The upshot of such comments, is that the systematic violence used against the political opponents of Fascism is either ignored or euphemised to such a point that it amounts to tacit support.

From the start of October, longer compliments and comments were offered regarding the virtues of Fascism. Issue 14 itself states "Italy, in spite of a World depression, is riding the crest of a wave of national confidence. Mussolini has given the people a new virility, sooner or later it must find expression" (*War and our imperial destiny*, October 1st, 1932). In Issue 20, a full page article headlined *Mussolini and the making of Modern Italy: Ten years of progress* (November 12th, 1932: 5), heaps praise upon praise on 10 years of Mussolini's fascist government—a government whose first achievement, the text reminds us, was defeating Communism. It reads: "Ten years ago Communism was rife throughout Italy. Many prophesied an upheaval such as had taken place in Russia. That danger was scotched. Mussolini gave Italy a new soul". 'Scotching' Communists in the UK also appear to be an ambition of the newspaper. It is argued for in several articles in this later period of the sample, and fantasised about in this cartoon of John Bull—the conservative national personification of the United Kingdom—as a policeman, striking a Union leader with a truncheon (see: *Figure 2*).

The cartoon relates to the National Hunger March of September—October 1932, which arrived at Hyde Park on October 27th. The spectre of the threat of Communism looms large in *Reality*'s account of the march, and perhaps for good reason.[3] The march, which was organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement (a front organisation created by the Communist Party of Great Britain), attracted the largest support for any of the hunger marches staged during the 1920s and 30s. Despite receiving very little attention from news media on their way to London, the marchers were joined in Hyde Park by a crowd of around 100,000 supporters (Cronin 1984). Their arrival in the capital was met with "an almost blanket condemnation as a threat to public order, verging upon the hysterical in the case of some of the more conservative

3 | The column *Seen, Said and Done* by Pall Mall in this same issue argues: "The riots in London are symptoms of the undertow of Communism, which is far more menacing than is generally realised" (October 29th, 1932).

Figure 2: John Bull "speaks" with violence

Source: Reality, October 29th, 1932: 3.

press" (Stephenson and Cook 1979: 173), in addition to the Metropolitan Police's "most intensive public order precautions since 1848" (Thurlow 2006: 63). The Union leader in the cartoon—having dropped his flag declaring that he is a "Red"—is criticised by John Bull in familiar terms for the newspaper: he has "never done any work" (rather ironic, given that this was a National *Unemployed* Workers Movement), that he "only seek[s] the limelight" and is the first to run away when it comes to "a real fight". The newspaper, on the other hand, appears to be itching for such a fight.

The launch of the BUF was greeted with a cautious optimism by the newspaper. On October 29th they gave their front-page editorial to discussing the policies of the new party, in a text that seems designed to reassure the reader (*Mosley and the future of fascism: Some sound points in the new Party's policy*, October 29th, 1932: 1) . The editorial is complimentary about Mosley in populist, anti-establishment, terms, arguing: "none could accuse him of licking the boots of those in superior political positions with a view to ensuring his own personal advancement". As the lead paragraph states: "A great deal of nonsense has been talked regarding the British Fascists. They have been accused of bellicose nationalism, indicted as revolutionaries, and have been attacked by the Jews for anti-semiticism [sic]. In an interview with Mr Patrick Moir, a leader of the party, he has informed us of the lack of truth in these rumours". The article itself then picks up on these points and reiterates that they're false—usually formulated as apparent disclaimers, using words like 'although'. For example:

> "*Although* members of the party have come to blows with the Jewish element, Sir Oswald has definitely stated that his intentions are not in any way anti-semitic".

These manoeuvres are labelled 'apparent' disclaimers because the structure of their discourse is such that the ostensible function of the utterance—conceding a point, emoting empathy, and so on—is immediately flouted by the accompanying clauses (van Dijk et al. 1997: 170). Such disclaimers are used by participants "in an effort to forestall negative inferences by others, and to project an image of rationality, objectivity and fairness" (Kleiner 1998: 206)—and in this case, to claim that the party does not harbour antisemitic intentions, even while acknowledging antisemitic violence. As a part of this reassurance, the article equivocates the political end goals of the party, stating: "In their political programme, the primary object of the party is the reorganisation of Parliamentary Representation"—not the *abolition* of Parliament,

Figure 3: "Mosley and the future of fascism"

No. 18 REGISTERED AS A NEWSPAPER. LONDON, OCTOBER 29th, 1932 TWOPENCE

MOSLEY AND THE FUTURE OF FASCISM

SOME SOUND POINTS IN THE NEW PARTY'S POLICY

A GREAT deal of nonsense has been talked regarding the British Fascists. They have been accused of bellicose nationalism, indicted as revolutionaries, and have been attacked by the Jews for anti-semiticism. In an interview with Mr. Patrick Moir, a leader of the party, he has informed us of the lack of truth in these rumours, and has told us of the actual programme mapped out by Sir Oswald Mosley and his colleagues for industrial and Parliamentary re-organisation.

AS a political figure, Sir Oswald Mosley has up to now undergone a somewhat chequered career, but the straightforward manner in which he has proceeded in Parliament has earned him respect, if not always support, from both the working and moneyed classes.

He has never sought office or, indeed, attempted to retain it against the run of his convictions, and none could accuse him of licking the boots of those in superior political positions with a view to ensuring his own personal advancement.

Whatever his worst enemies may say against him, they could not, in justice, accuse him of sycophancy. In this one respect alone he places himself outside the usual run of British politicians.

There have been, and still are, many doubters of his sincerity.

The average working man has frequently expressed surprise that Mosley, a man of inherited wealth and position, should espouse so ardently a cause, the rights of which, his birth and upbringing must needs render it difficult to appreciate.

WHERE WORDS FAILED.

If there are those who still hold him in distrust to-day, it may be that his actions during the next few months will convince where words have failed. It remains to be seen.

His immediate future rests in the hands of those who are willing to support the cause with which he has now associated himself.

By this we mean the British Union of Fascists.

"Reality" as a newspaper, is interested in the advancement of no particular party, but observing, as we do, the growing strength of the Fascists now that Sir Oswald has assumed their leadership, we feel it necessary to make some reference to the policy of Parliamentary and industrial reform which they are now advocating.

Respecting the aim of Hitler, the Nazi leader, in relation to his attitude towards youth, and believing in the policy of Mussolini as regarding the need for closer co-operation between Parliament and Industry, the British Union of Fascists has come into being in much the same manner as the two vast Italian and German organisations bearing the same name.

Beyond this it is entirely pro-British in its outlook, believes only in a revolution of political thought, and although interested, has no intention of advocating the political ideals of Soviet Russia.

Although members of the party have come to blows with the Jewish element, Sir Oswald has definitely stated that his intentions are not in any way anti-semitic.

It has also been said of the British Fascists that they are a militant organisation, attempting to engender to a dangerous degree the spirit of Nationalism.

After discussing the matter with a leader of the Party, Mr. Patrick Moir, we are convinced that bellicose militarisers is not intended to play any part in their activities, although disarmament is regarded at the present moment as a step which would be fatal both to Britain and her Dominions.

In their political programme the primary object of the party is the re-organisation of Parliamentary Representation with a view to granting industry a more adequate voice in the direction of the country's affairs.

INDUSTRIAL REPRESENTATIVES.

They call for the abolition of constituencies as we know them to-day, and the substitution in their place of an electoral system which would allow of each industry electing representatives according to its size and the degree of its importance.

By this means it is anticipated that the election of members on the grounds of personal popularity, and who are often in no way fitted for office, except by reason of a certain superficial command of rhetoric, would be obviated, and men who really knew the needs of the industry which they represented in their place.

With regard to Capitalism and individual enterprise the Fascists are of the opinion that it should be given every opportunity, but suggest that in some instances where industrialists are agreeable, Nationalisation might make for a reduction in manufacturing and marketing costs.

A March of the British Fascists. What Mosley Visualises.

Sir Oswald Mosley.

It is impossible in the limited space we have at our disposal, to outline the whole policy of the British Fascists, but the following points given to us by their organisation should give some idea of the reforms they have in mind.

DORA TO BE REMOVED.

1. Prohibition of Strikes and Lockouts. 2. Refusal to allow bankers to place handicaps in the way of industrial progress. 3. No surrender to Indian agitators. 4. Government action to break the stranglehold of Indian moneylenders upon the peasantry. 5. Dora, and other checks upon our liberty, to be removed. 6. Restrictions to be allowed to remain only where the action of the individual will interfere with the well-being of the State. 7. Direct exchange of goods with the Empire to give us necessary food supplies. 8. Taxation to be lighter for those with money invested in speculative shares. 9. The raising of wages and the employment of the workless upon industrial development schemes. 10. Concentration of our manufacturers upon the home market.

This summary, it is to be hoped, has made clear some of the points in the party's programme. It is no revolutionary policy, and although open in many of its views to considerable argument, may be said, as far as it goes, to be well balanced and constructive. We shall watch its future with more than ordinary interest.

Source: Reality, October 29th, 1932.

which Mosley argued for quite openly in his own books. This duplicitous strategy mirrored that of the German Nazi Party, in that they chose to present themselves "as a virile fighting force ready to respond to a national emergency while also insisting on their intention to acquire power by institutional means" (Pugh 2006: 73). This virility is indexed in this article by the phalanx of marching Blackshirts streaming past the observer, and off into the distance on the right of the cartoon. The final line of the article picks up on this fig leaf political reasonableness, using a form of expression which is quintessentially of its time: "It is no revolutionary policy, and although open in many of its views to considerable argument, may be said, as far as it goes, to be well balanced and constructive. We shall watch its future with more than ordinary interest".

Dreaming of a Pogrom

he clearest indication of the hardening ideological line of the paper, towards the end of the 20-issue sample *Reality* published texts contemplating violence against British Jews. Issue 15, printed a week after the launch of the BUF, included an article headlined *Jews and Fascists* reporting the "Fascist campaign in Great Britain, heralded by the publication last week of 'The Greater Britain' [...] is now being extended from London by the formation of bands of 'storm troops" in towns throughout the country" (October 8th, 1932: 5). The report explicitly states "most of his blackshirts have adopted an anti-Semitic attitude [...] that Jewry exercises too great an influence in British and Imperial affairs". Rather than criticising or contradicting this point, the newspaper instead confirms it, arguing: "Few will deny that Jewish financial interests are as powerful in Britain today as they ever have been". The report also approvingly quotes Mosley's book *The Greater Britain* where "he himself has something to say about 'money power'. 'At present we have within the nation an influence, largely controlled by alien interests, which arrogates itself a power above the Press"'. The text ends with the rather pregnant remark, couched in bourgeois nicety:

> "Will the launching of a Fascist campaign result in a wave of anti-Semitic feeling throughout the Empire, such as Germany has experienced under the Hitlerites? Tolerance towards the Jews has been the policy of England since Charles II's time. Within the next few months the public may be called upon to decide whether that policy it to be continued".

A couple of other articles were far less equivocal in arguing that the time has come to do something about the Jews. In one article, *Reality*

questions the belief of "self-complacent democrats" that "a movement like Hitler's is impossible in this country" (*"Gentiles Only"*, November 5th, 1932: 13). Quoting eight accommodation adverts stipulating "Gentiles only" and "No Jews", from one page of the *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, the newspaper recommends "It would probably pay the British Union of Fascists to go on a recruiting expedition round these districts". The front page editorial on the Jewish menace to the furniture industry (October 22nd, 1932) provoked a significant response from letter writers—the four critical letters referred to above were followed by two letters praising their position (*Vox Pop*, November 5th, 1932: 5). Together, the two letters are a textbook case of the contradictions typical of antisemitic discourse: "the Jew" in these texts—echoing *Der Jude* of Germanic discourse—is simultaneously a wealthy usurer and the "poor unshorn and unsavoury children of the Ghetto" whose "presence is often a menace and an injury to the English working classes" (Silberner 1952: 40-41). Thus, the second letter railed against "the foreign Jew" who, wherever they go in London, "the neighbourhood soon looks dilapidated and wretched". The first provides a more detailed, and threatening, complaint:

> "Having come in contact in business with hundreds of Jews in London, and knowing full well the conditions in which they work their employees, it is no wonder that they can turn out the cheap shoddy products which we find displayed in several retail shops in different parts of the country. [...] I happened to be on a stand at the Radio Exhibition this year, and listened to the tales of woe from hundreds of radio retailers and factors and heard the expression used, *'If only England had a Hitler' to clear some of the Jewish parasites out of the country.* [emphasis added]".

The final line of this extract is startling, particularly given the date it was written. Published almost three months before Hitler was made Chancellor and significantly ahead of either Dugdale's abridged English translation of *Mein Kampf* (October 1933) or the serialisation of *Mein Kampf* in *The Times* (July 24-28 1933), which helped bring Nazi ideology into the popular British consciousness, this letter writer was suitably informed to predict the planned Nazi *Judenrein*. But more than this, the editors of the newspaper also recognised this prediction as accurate, or perhaps convincing—otherwise the letter is unlikely to have been published. Such an observation almost renders 'foreshadowing' an acceptable analytic position in this case: certainly, we could not suggest that the writers, and editors, of this newspaper were aware of the full implications of the Nazi's 'final solution'. However, they were at least fa-

miliar with the Nazi's violent antisemitism—and were content to publish this letter calling for similar course of action in the UK.

Discussion

Throughout the sample, *Reality* frequently drew on, and emphasised, a number of key ideological assumptions and arguments. The central argumentative theme was the inborn inequality of human beings—that personal and social characteristics derive from biological inheritance with certain personal/social/biological characteristics being judged to be more or less valuable. The most popular sub-variant of this heredity-as-hierarchy dealt with 'race', 'racial' difference and its presumed import for culture and civilisation. Such ideological arguments were typically realized in, and through, articles on the Empire and Britain"s Imperial Dominions: articles on particular people who played an influential role in the formation and success of the Empire (at least, the success *for Us*!); of a detailed preoccupation with the British Empire Economic Conference that took place in Ottawa in 1932; and of apocryphal tales of good, stout Indians who gave their lives for civilisation, protecting their Imperial Masters (and white women) at the Northern frontier. Some of these stories ennoble 'the Indian' to a degree that contradicts the racism contained elsewhere in the paper—though, it should go without saying that this human value is contingent on their continued sacrifice in the service of (our) King and Country.

That said, the political content of the newspaper did change over the 20 issues in this sample. Broadly speaking, towards the start of the sample, articles tend to focus more on discussing 'the problem'—in criticising the 'feeble minded' and identifying a range of economic and political problems that Britain currently faced. Later, there is a partial shift towards offering an *explanation* and a *solution* to these problems: the explanation centred on the influence of disruptive political and economic elements. Domestically this was Communists and the Unions; in Ireland it was very definitely Eamon De Valera and Irish Republicans; in India it was Gandhi and 'Indian agitators'. The newspaper's solution is couched in terms of 'common sense', which initially centred on greater cooperation between worker and employer; in the final 5 issues, this shifted, and appeared to rest with the policies of the BUF which had, apparently, already been successfully road tested in Italy. Unfortunately the sample ends before we can really see if this allegiance becomes more

firmly established, and the newspaper moves more fully and consistently from the politics of the radical right and towards fascism. However, Issue 20 there featured an article written by Patrick Moir, described again as a leader of the party. Here, he is given a quarter page to advance the BUF view on the employment and current exploitation of youth. This, the growing acceptance of the utility of political antisemitism and the increasing number of complimentary articles about Mussolini's Italy, signal this growing convergence of the paper with fascist politics.

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