

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, OSWALD MOSLEY, AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF APPEASEMENT REVISITED

by

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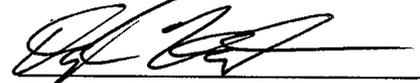
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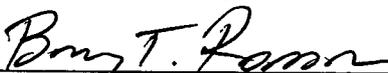
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the historiography of Neville Chamberlain and appeasement through the lens of Oswald Mosley and British Fascism, arguing that an acute and unexpected convergence emerges between the ardent radicalism of Mosley and the utter rationality of Chamberlain, illustrating the uncanny degree to which appeasement as a policy dovetailed with fascism as an ideology. Beginning at the Spanish Civil War and ending in March 1939, politicians in the vein of Chamberlain – subsequently dubbed ‘appeasers’ – pursued appeasement as a means to placate German aggression. The British Union of Fascists, with Mosley at the helm, enthusiastically supported this movement and urged the British Government to intensify the appeasement campaign. Ultimately, the convergence of appeasement and fascism illustrates the severe lack of alternatives available to Chamberlain, and underscores the degree to which his pragmatic politics supported fascism abroad.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Roberto and Elena, and my grandfather, Felipe, whose patience, love, and understanding have supported me not only throughout this process, but throughout my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: MOSLEY’S MEN IN BLACK; THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS.....	16
CHAPTER TWO: AN INCHOATE ACCORDANCE: MOSLEY AND CHAMBERLAIN IN 1936-1937.....	36
CHAPTER THREE: IF AT FIRST YOU CAN’T CONCEDE, FLY, FLY, FLY AGAIN: MOSLEY, CHAMBERLAIN, AND THE MUNICH AGREEMENT.....	63
CHAPTER FOUR: THE WAR WE WANT IS A WAR ON WANT: MOSLEY, INTERNMENT, AND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR.....	84
CONCLUSION	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of October 1st, 1938 the aircraft of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain touched down at Heston Aerodrome in London. As the weary silhouette of Chamberlain emerged from within, an enthusiastic mob besieged the aircraft. Trying merely to catch a glimpse of their transcendent Prime Minister, the mob raucously celebrated as Chamberlain triumphantly raised his right hand. Clutched between his worn fingers, Chamberlain held the culmination of his celebrated political career, the would-be crystallization of a decades-long pursuit.

Only months earlier, Europe had stood on the precipice of war. Germany, under the direction of Adolf Hitler, threatened a full-scale assault on Czechoslovakia. As tensions rose – and continental loyalties descended into disparate factions – war seemed all but imminent. Chamberlain, however, remained unwaveringly resolute in his convictions and, at the eleventh hour, summoned a four-power conference. Proffering accordance, Chamberlain dexterously administered the peaceful transfer of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland and, more importantly, procured – along with Hitler – what he thought would be an enduring Anglo-German peace.

Indeed, on the morning of October 1st, as Chamberlain disembarked from his aircraft, word had already spread of his inspired actions. Thus, as he raised his right hand, and boisterously flaunted for all in attendance the now notorious “Munich Agreement,” the mob surrounding him unilaterally rejoiced. “The settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem,” he proclaimed, “which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the prelude

to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine.” Interrupted by riotous applause, Chamberlain quieted his admirers, and steadfastly continued: “Some of you, perhaps, have already heard what it contains but I would just like to read it to you: ‘We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.’”¹

All across England, and indeed the world, as politicians and citizens alike applauded their champion of peace, an incensed, yet dynamic personality spouted vitriol at the ostensibly joyous occasion. “And now what has happened,” questioned the infuriated orator, “Something has got busy. What is it? Why is it the cloud of war is hovering over us again? Why are we again threatened with war? Why is it the whole of the British Press are talking war again? Why is it the Labour Party are screaming for war? Why is it that pressure is brought against the Government in favour of war?”² Less than one day after Chamberlain’s proclamation, Oswald Mosley – leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) – offered these questions to his small yet devoted following. Mosley, in answering his pseudo-rhetorical exercise, drummed up the traditional fascist scapegoat as the source of this instigation: international finance. Indeed, British Fascist anti-Semitism pervaded the collective consciousness of Mosley’s movement, and led to considerable criticism of the allegedly Jewish-driven British Government.

Yet, within their often cantankerous assessment of Parliament, the British Union of Fascists – and Mosley in particular – championed a particular faction within

¹ PREM 1-266A/132/ 35, Neville Chamberlain, “Peace For Our Time,” September 30th, 1938. *Records of the Prime Minister’s Office*, National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

² NA: KV 4-140/26/23, “Speech by Sir Oswald Mosley” October 1st, 1938.

Parliament. Beginning with the Spanish Civil War, and ending in March 1939, politicians in the vein of Chamberlain – subsequently dubbed ‘appeasers’ – pursued appeasement as a means to placate German aggression. The BUF, with Mosley at the helm, enthusiastically supported these ‘precious few,’ and urged the British Government to intensify the appeasement campaign. Accordingly, this thesis will analyze the historiography of Neville Chamberlain and appeasement through the lens of Oswald Mosley and British Fascism. Ultimately, an acute and unexpected convergence emerges between the ardent radicalism of Mosley and the utter rationality of Chamberlain, illustrating the uncanny degree to which appeasement as a policy dovetailed with fascism as an ideology.

In presenting the historiography of the British Union of Fascists and appeasement, it remains impossible to ignore the diametrically opposed treatments Neville Chamberlain and Oswald Mosley, as champions of appeasement and fascism respectively, have received. In the aftermath of World War II – with anti-Fascist tensions lingering – authors in the vein of Winston Churchill summarily condemned Chamberlain and his foreign policy of appeasement. Concurrently, and without explanation, Oswald Mosley – leader of the British Union of Fascists and war-time detainee – could only watch (and perhaps smirk) as authors published narratives adopting a supportive and sympathetic tone. As waves of revisionism eventually eroded this paradigm, and Chamberlain’s reputation experienced a measure of rehabilitation, Mosley enjoyed even more sympathetic portrayals. It was only when historians began to question revisionist methodology, and the pendulum of appeasement swung to a counter-revisionist ‘middle ground,’ that Mosley’s reputation came under critical assessment. Within this counter-

revisionist archetype, a certain level of professional skepticism has emerged, and corroded the sympathy characteristic of earlier Mosley-centric works. Accordingly, Mosley's personal and political dogma has necessitated a revision; one that has trended toward increasingly negative portrayals.

In May of 1940, as the English desperately retreated from Dunkirk – consigned to their island penitentiary – three frustrated men published a scathing assessment of British foreign policy. Writing under the pseudonym 'Cato,' Michael Foot, Peter Howard, and Frank Owen eviscerated Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain (the arch-appeaser) in their landmark work, *Guilty Men*.³ Cato ascribed a unilateral culpability to these men: “[they] took over a great empire, supreme in arms and secure in liberty, and they conducted it to the edge of annihilation.”⁴ Though rushed into production, and possessing a litany of factual errors, Cato has nonetheless enjoyed immense success. Its vitriolic oversimplification appealed to a bewildered public desperately seeking an explanation for its collective failure. Cato, in this regard, has proved utterly accessible. The authors have condemned Chamberlain for proffering significant concessions in the self-aggrandizing hope of maintaining peace, while at the same time neglecting Britain's armaments.

Writing in the aftermath of World War II, when popular sentiment associated the horrific injustices of Nazism with Britain's collective tentativeness, Sir Winston Churchill has proved the failing policy's most passionate, (and indeed) vocal opponent. An orthodox embodiment of anti-appeasement fervor, Churchill

³ At publication, the title *Guilty Men* referred to fifteen public figures: Neville Chamberlain, Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare, Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin, Lord Halifax, Sir Kingsley Wood, Ernest Brown, David Margesson, Sir Horace Wilson, Sir Thomas Inskip, Leslie Burgin, Earl Stanhope, W.S. Morrison, and Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith. However, after its popularization, *Guilty Men* became synonymous with anyone that had supported appeasement.

⁴ Michael Foot, Peter Howard, and Frank Owen, *Guilty Men* (London: Penguin, 1940), 17.

condemned the tentative foreign policy of his predecessors. In *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm*, Churchill has argued that Germans were not intrinsically malevolent, but instead possessed a certain defiance towards their defeat in World War I. Accordingly, Churchill balked at a foreign policy (appeasement) which permitted German military rearmament while the aftermath of the previous war cultivated a growing disdain towards Britain. Indeed, the Treaty of Versailles – a peace treaty signed after the conclusion of World War I – forced Germany to accept sole responsibility for the war, and forced numerous concessions and reparations that crippled Germany’s weakened economy. The only logical course, according to Churchill, consisted of confronting Nazi Germany before full rearmament could be achieved. Appeasement, to that end, delayed this confrontation, leaving Britain to acquiesce in the face of Germany’s ostentatious rearmament. This diffidence, according to Churchill, proved the fundamental cog spinning the power politics that led Europe to war. “It is my purpose,” he argued, “to show how easily the tragedy of the Second World War could have been prevented; how the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous...how the counsels of prudence and restraint may become the prime agents mortal danger; and how the middle course adopted from desires for safety and a quiet life may be found to lead direct to the bulls-eye of disaster.”⁵ According to Churchill, the patience and restraint of the appeasers essentially conceded not only an equal military footing, but a dominant continental presence.

Writing after Churchill and Cato, in the midst of this anti-appeasement fervor, a separate group of scholars focused their attention on British Fascism, presenting

⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 1: The Gathering Storm* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 18.

sympathetic narratives that adroitly traced the melodramatic rise-and-fall of Oswald Mosley. Though including other fascist movements, these authors have generally concentrated (rightfully so) on Mosley's impact within the British Union of Fascists. Their accounts generally commence in the 1920's, when a handsome, wealthy, eloquent, and admired Mosley – perhaps the Labour Party's most capable rhetorician – presented his manifesto for resolving Britain's economic struggles.⁶ Powerless as his Labour superiors summarily rejected the proposal, Mosley embarked on a rebellious (and almost messianic) quest to bring Fascism, and his leadership, to Britain. According to David Cross, in *The Fascists in Britain*, Mosley very nearly realized this ambition. Indeed, Cross has contended that Mosley “had reason for optimism. Within weeks of its foundation the BUF was a nationally known movement and was fighting its first battles in the streets. Hitler's success had great publicity value. Newspapers were eager to speculate whether Mosley would be the British Hitler. In the general view, Mosley was the abler man. There was steady recruiting... It was a time to ask if Britain under the leadership of the ‘modern movement’ should seek to copy Germany and set up an entirely new form of state.”⁷ Though perhaps overstating the extent of Mosley's political prowess, Cross has deftly illustrated the manner in which Mosley destroyed it. The Olympia Rally – a political rally held June 8th, 1934 –unilaterally revealed Fascist brutality and acted, according to Cross, as a lightning rod to which radical groups gravitated and ultimately overwhelmed Mosley into adopting an anti-Semitic policy: “Olympia attracted a small but influential element which glorified the Nazism described

⁶ Though rejected by his party, Mosley's economic reform plan – or the “Mosley Manifesto” – has enjoyed positive appraisals by modern historians and economists alike.

⁷ Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), 78.

by the Anti-Nazis...which in three or four months demoted Mosley's popular status from that of potential national leader to that of an eccentric ex-MP with delusions of grandeur."⁸

David Shermer, author of *Blackshirts: Fascism in Britain*, in describing this post-Olympia political outlook, has simultaneously emphasized the stunting affect violent anti-Semitism inflicted on party policy. According to Shermer, anti-Semitism so dominated ideological development that the BUF never cultivated a cogent foreign policy: "British Fascism had few principles in foreign policy beyond an advocacy of strong national defenses, a deep distrust of the League of Nations and a vague belief that the leaders of the 'modern movement' in the principle European countries should, in power, be capable of defining their individual spheres of influence – Britain in her Empire, Hitler in Eastern Europe and Mussolini in the Balkans."⁹ For Shermer, BUF racial ideology trumped party development, and, to a large extent, constrained the movement as a whole.

Eventually, as the works of Churchill, Cross, and others established the orthodox historiography of both British Fascism and appeasement, a wave of revisionism largely eroded the criticism directed at Chamberlain while substantiating the sympathy directed at Mosley. Indeed, only two decades after war, a group of appeasement historians broadened the scope of their inquiry, perceiving Chamberlain's policy as but a single component of the larger pre-war mosaic. This revisionist group of scholars, in response to the orthodox interpretation, has sought to widen the scope of appeasement scholarship, shifting the focus to an overextended

⁸ Ibid, 116.

⁹ David Shermer, *Blackshirts: Fascism in Britain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 82.

empire lacking the necessary resources and cohesion to mount a worthy counter-offensive to German aggression. In considering these circumstances, revisionists have generally contended appeasement emerged as Britain's lone political course.

Conversely, historians of British Fascism, writing in the wake of this revisionism, largely reinforced the contentions of orthodox scholarship, with some – most notably Mosley himself – presenting particularly unbalanced and justificatory accounts.

Writing less than twenty years after the end of World War II, A.J.P. Taylor advanced a controversial and revolutionary hypothesis concerning the orthodox interpretation of appeasement. In *The Origins of the Second World War*, Taylor drastically altered the appeasement paradigm, sparking a well publicized and controversial shift that greatly rehabilitated Chamberlain's political reputation. Taylor has contended that in the years preceding World War II Great Britain suffered a debilitating set of circumstances that essentially left appeasement as Chamberlain's lone political course. Indeed, according to Taylor, Chamberlain was forced to navigate the high cost of rearmament, an anti-war public opinion, and, perhaps most damning, the notion that a British declaration of war would cause thousands of civilian casualties (for both countries) and, should Britain prevail, a potential communist revolution in Germany. When viewed through this lens, appeasement proved utterly pragmatic.¹⁰

Taylor has also argued that Hitler lacked a premeditated program of aggression; and, in fact, “was intending to succeed without a war, or at any rate only with a war so nominal as hardly to be distinguished from diplomacy. He was not

¹⁰ See Watt, Donald Cameron. *How War Came: Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939*. London, Mandarin, 1989.

projecting a major war...and was not interested in preparing for a long war against the Great Powers.”¹¹ For Taylor, Hitler’s primary political objective was not belligerence, but instead a dramatic revision of the infamous Treaty of Versailles. Yet as he patiently waited for these promised revisions, a series of intercontinental blunders (committed by all great powers) dragged Europe to war. “The blame for war,” Taylor has explained, “can be put on Hitler’s Nihilism instead of on the faults and failures of European Statesman – faults and failures which their public shared. Human blunders, however, usually do more to shape history than human wickedness.”¹² Hitler, according to Taylor, lacked the calculated, warmongering qualities ascribed to him by orthodox scholars. As a result, Germany, like all European powers, grudgingly stumbled into conflict; and should therefore bear an equal – as opposed to unequal – share of blame.

Mosley, writing in the wake of appeasement revisionism, attempted (unsuccessfully) to mitigate his own errors through the lens of retrospective self-justification. He has attributed large segments of BUF culpability unto others. In his autobiography, *My Life: Sir Oswald Mosley*, Mosley has tendentiously argued that “not only had I rarely ever mentioned Jews [pre-Olympia], but any member attacking the Jews had been expelled from our disciplined movement... There was no shadow of suspicion that we were an anti-Semitic movement when Jews attacked our Olympia meeting.”¹³ Mosley, writing several years after Olympia, has contended that BUF anti-Semitism was a defensive political stand against belligerent Jewish Communists. Perhaps even more

¹¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Touchstone, 1961), 217.

¹² Ibid, 216.

¹³ Sir Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968), 338.

damning has been Mosley's post-war assessment of Hitler, whom he has regarded as "not desiring war with Russia, because his aims were limited to the union of the German peoples in Europe."¹⁴ In regards to the war itself, Mosley has steadfastly deemed it unnecessary, and even gone so far as to claim Britain, on many levels, suffered defeat: "The British Empire has lost confidence in itself and has gained confidence in nothing else, neither hope nor idea. England – the land of genius, of daring, of energy, of eternal leadership and creative inspiration – stands humbly hat in hand to bet the support of its American children, and mumbles tired excuses as it shuffles out of Empire, Europe, leadership, and history."¹⁵

As revisionist scholarship swung the pendulum of historical interpretation towards sensitivity for Chamberlain and rationalization for Mosley, a more moderate, counter-revisionist movement eventually emerged. Appeasement scholars associated with this grouping have generally adopted a more restrained perception between the polarized contentions of orthodoxy and revisionism. Indeed, these historians have sought to remove the orthodox label of coward while criticizing the methodological practices of revisionism for their overly-sympathetic proclivities. Ultimately, counter-revisionists have adopted a revisionist sensitivity with an orthodox sensibility, contending appeasers (primarily Neville Chamberlain) found themselves somewhat limited under empire constraints, yet also fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Nazi expansionism. Historians of British Fascism, in a similar vein, have generally presented more critical accounts of Mosley, focusing on the inherent limitations of his

¹⁴ Ibid, 365.

¹⁵ Ibid, 397.

political doctrine while also exploring his tumultuous and often controversial personal life.

In *Hitler and Appeasement: the British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War*, Peter Neville has contended that, contrary to orthodox obduracy, appeasement had always been a significant weapon in Britain's arsenal of foreign policy. Britain, according to Neville, "historically had always been a great power which had preferred to settle disputes by diplomatic means. In this sense, therefore, appeasement was a 'normal continuation of the British diplomatic tradition of attempting to settle disputes peacefully.'"¹⁶ Ultimately, Neville has adopted a counter-revisionist balance, portraying appeasers reacting with a particularly "rational response to a very difficult position. [Yet] this is not to argue that there is no case against the appeasers."¹⁷ This complicated and, particularly volatile, international situation has lent itself to careful thought and manipulation. Appeasers, according to Neville, acted with a rationality and aplomb consistent with British tradition. After all, the atrocities of the previous war left Britain economically, military, and politically insolvent. This anti-war sentiment has not, however, exonerated appeasers from a certain level of culpability. Neville has unsympathetically criticized Chamberlain's government for its inability to adapt after the establishment, however unpredictable, of the non-aggression pact. Signed on August 23rd, 1939, the non-aggression, or Molotov-Ribbentrop, pact pledged that if either Germany or the Soviet Union was attacked by a third party, both countries would remain neutral. Chamberlain, according to Neville, stumbled in his policy calculations after this

¹⁶ Peter Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon & London, 2007), xiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

ostensible accordance: “What Chamberlain and his colleagues underestimated was the residue of suspicion between them and the Kremlin, and Stalin’s reaction to the USSR’s exclusion from the Czech settlement a year earlier.”¹⁸ It was this tactical miscalculation, along with Chamberlain’s inability to adapt, that Neville has credited with the collapse of both British Foreign Policy and the Prime Minister’s political standing.

While counter-revisionist appeasement scholars have sought to complicate the revisionist paradigm, a group of Mosley-centric scholars, in assessing the self-aggrandizing retrospection of earlier works, have sought to present a more nuanced, and indeed critical, interpretation of BUF ideology. Stephen Dorril, author of *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism*, has criticized the ‘overly-sympathetic’ perceptions many historians have developed towards Mosley. Dorril has contended that “Mosley’s claim that the Jewish question was ‘a topic which had no place whatever in party policy’ was simply untrue; it had merely been suppressed during the Rothermere period, which indicated the degree to which it was under his strict control.”¹⁹ According to Dorril, BUF anti-Semitism was restrained by Mosley (until Communist provocation) to deliver the illusion of a reactionary, not racial, position against Jews. BUF policy masked its prejudice for political reasons; but the swelling contingent of Anti-Semites within party ranks could only be restrained for so long. Olympia proved to be the breach, revealing the BUF’s true racial ideology. While acknowledging, however begrudgingly, the limited merits of Mosley’s economic, international, and gender programs, Dorril has nonetheless presented a critical narrative. He cites Mosley’s inability to gauge the political character of others, specifically Hitler and Mussolini, as a lethal flaw in a foreign policy predicated

¹⁸ Neville, 181.

¹⁹ Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt* (London: Penguin, 2006), 304.

on this aptitude. Similarly, Dorril's extensive research exposing Mosley's illicit love affairs (of which there were several) has revealed an arrogant, officious, and narcissistic individual.²⁰ In comparing both Hitler and Mosley, two ostensibly charismatic leaders, Dorril concludes Mosley's arrogance and narcissism created a negative impression of over-confidence, while Hitler "had a very soft side to his nature, so that people felt terribly that they would like to help him... There was something almost vulnerable which made men want to help him and made women want to cherish him."²¹ Mosley lacked any semblance of this quality. In many respects, his arrogant demeanor – whether challenging aristocracy, government, or other platitudes – created negative impressions that crippled his lasting success.

The overwhelming majority of appeasement scholarship has tapered its analysis at the top, as if appeasement was confined to the halls of Parliament. This, of course, was not the case. A multitude of factors outside the realm of high politics affected, influenced, and illuminated the politicking within. Indeed, outside of the traditional appeasement archetype, little historiographical attention has been devoted to political movements – and their relationship to appeasement – in Britain prior to the war. This thesis seeks to fill this void, and contribute to existing scholarship through the congruent examination of Mosley and Chamberlain's foreign policies. Ultimately, in perceiving appeasement through the lens of British Fascism, Mosley emerges as a unique medium from which historians may further ascertain the nature of appeasement. His seemingly contradictory character – at once a genteel, aristocratic, and fiercely patriotic Britain who,

²⁰ Edward Dutton, "Britain's Fascist Puppet," review of *Blackshirt*, by Stephen Dorril, *The Occidental Quarterly*, April 2007, http://www.toqonline.com/archives/v7n1/dutton_review.pdf.

²¹ Dorril, 336.

without hesitation, unilaterally embraced anti-Semitism, revolution, and German extremism – places him in the ideological jurisdiction of both Chamberlain and Hitler. Indeed, in uniting the seemingly incongruous tenets of British tradition with fascist radicalism, Mosley essentially bridged the gap between Chamberlain and Hitler. This thesis will capitalize on this unique position, using Mosley to demonstrate how the restricted alternatives available to Chamberlain forced a rational policy that ultimately, albeit unintentionally, aligned with a pro-fascist dogma. That is not to say Chamberlain lacked alternatives, only that restrictions inherent to Britain's particular circumstance thrust Chamberlain into a precarious situation. In that vein, this thesis ultimately contributes a deeper understanding of counter-revisionist historiography in its portrayal of Chamberlain as limited yet culpable.

The first chapter of this thesis presents a brief history of Oswald Mosley before considering the creation of the British Union of Fascists and the problematic ramifications – both in the recruitment of members and the development of party policy – BUF anti-Semitism engendered. Chapter two explores the burgeoning connection between Oswald Mosley and Neville Chamberlain against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War and the precipitous escalation of Anglo-German tensions. Chapter three concentrates on the apex of appeasement, the Munich Agreement, and the ideological alignment inherent in the foreign policies of Mosley and Chamberlain. This chapter then explores the drastic collapse of Chamberlain's incarnation of appeasement – as well as Mosley's reaction – in the wake of the March 1939 German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Chapter four analyzes the pro-German constitution of the BUF, Mosley's increasingly

pro-German foreign policy, and the hundreds of BUF members willing to commit treason against Britain.

I. MOSLEY'S MEN IN BLACK: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS

Unlike other Fascist leaders, who came from humble backgrounds, Oswald Mosley was born into the gentry, to Sir Oswald Mosley Sr. and Katharine Edwards-Heathcote on November 16th, 1896. Educated at West Downs, and later Winchester College, Mosley enrolled in the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in January 1914. His tenure, however, proved to be short lived when, in September of that year, he was expelled after getting into a fight with another student.²² And so it was in the comfort of his home that Mosley learned of British entry into the Great War. Immediately recalled by Sandhurst, Mosley was commissioned into the 16th Queens Light Dragoons by Major Sir Lovelace Stamer in October 1914. After participating in several Western Front flying missions, Mosley suffered an airplane crash that left one leg significantly shorter than the other. Unable to fly, Mosley – still recovering from his injury – diverted his efforts to the trenches, and witnessed firsthand the carnage of battle. At the Battle of Loos in 1915, Mosley valiantly disregarded his injury and participated in the campaign. His impetuous heroism, however, eventually yielded to the pain of his wound. Near the end of the battle, after hours stationed at his post, Mosley collapsed under the weight of his injury, leaving him unconscious. Dragged from the battlefield, and no longer able to fight, Mosley spent the remainder of World War I behind a desk at the Ministry of Munitions.²³

²² Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt* (London: Penguin, 2006), 14.

²³ Sir Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968), 44-71.

For Mosley, the joy of victory was mitigated by the atrocities of trench warfare. Determined, as he called it, by a passionate conviction “that war must never happen again,”²⁴ Mosley took his inchoate political ideology to Parliament. Elected as a Conservative at Harrow in 1918, Mosley became the youngest seated member of the House of Commons.²⁵ His political doctrine – and indeed, his impetus for political life – stemmed from an entrenched belief in isolationism. Once elected, Mosley set about articulating this vision.

With his quick wit, and even quicker tongue, Mosley quickly garnered a reputation as an impatient but savvy politician. A capable rhetorician, Mosley unfailingly contested the alleged belligerency of his Parliamentary peers. In one particularly impassioned debate, Mosley lamented the quarrelsome initiatives of his future nemesis, Winston Churchill:

The right honourably gentleman has already had full opportunity for the display of his genius in war... May I beg him to turn his attention, flushed as he is with victories won and reverses manfully sustained on far flung fields – may I beg him to return to the less exciting but none the less exacting pursuits of peace? I am even ready to believe that unless he speedily devotes his great intellect to the furtherance of some great constructive work of peaceful organization – such as, for instance, the League of Nations – he will be in danger of occupying a lesser place in the verdict of posterity than his great predecessor and prototype, the first Napoleon.²⁶

Later that year, in response to a 1918 Lloyd George speech advocating Parliament to ‘cleanse this noble land,’ Mosley quickly advanced a radical program of ‘purification,’ including: public control of industry, shorter hours, higher wages, and retro-taxation on war profiteering. This last tenet, in particular, aggravated several members of Parliament;

²⁴ Ibid, 70.

²⁵ Sitting Member of the House of Commons. There was an abstentionist MP one year his junior.

²⁶ Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1963), 13.

and quickly ascribed to Mosley a reputation of arrogance. Indeed, within the confines of tradition-led Parliament, Mosley demonstrated an officious disregard for political custom. Though this aggravated many Members of Parliament, Mosley, always in possession of a rebellious tint, refused to conform to any custom, and continued to challenge the institutions of Parliament. This, combined with his impetuosity and disdain for political stagnation, would eventually prove his undoing.

Frustrated with the Conservative Party's static economic policy, Mosley crossed the floor and sat as an Independent in 1922. After vacillating politically, yet still maintaining his conservative constituency, Mosley joined the Independent Labour Party in 1924.²⁷ The switch, due in large part to Mosley's seemingly interminable frustration with Parliamentary bureaucracy, ignited the inchoate tenets of Mosley's eventual fascist ideology. Indeed, in adopting a more radical – and in his own words 'modern' – platform, Mosley took his first steps, however small, towards Fascism. His political ideology, still largely framed around an isolationist ideology, now included both a sincere plea for widespread economic reform and a growing desire for an authoritative leader to challenge Parliamentary bureaucracy.²⁸

Feeling his constituency disapproved of his move to Labour, Mosley immediately left Harrow and opposed Neville Chamberlain at Birmingham Ladywood. With the help of his wife, Lady Cynthia Curzon – the two married in 1920, though she would eventually succumb to peritonitis in 1933 – Mosley conducted a vigorous, and particularly querulous, campaign. The election, a hotly contested October race, proved a narrow defeat for Mosley. During this time away from Parliament, Mosley refocused his

²⁷ Dorril, 81.

²⁸ Ibid, 100-156.

energies on developing a new economic plan for the Labour Party. Later known as the Birmingham Proposals, this plan formed the foundation for Mosley's future economic policy. The underlying principle behind the proposals was a restoration of the pre-1914 worldwide economic framework. Domestically, this involved a constriction of governmental powers, along with the restoration of the Gold Standard. Mosley believed the Labour Party was incapable of finding a solution to Britain's economic problems because of its insistence on what he considered anachronistic solutions. The Birmingham Proposals attempted to "modernize" these archaic policies.²⁹

When the Labour Party won the general election in 1929, Mosley's hope for political advancement returned. Appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Mosley was tasked with solving the unemployment dilemma. His efforts, however, quickly created a quagmire of their own. Labeled 'too Radical,' Mosley's proposals were consistently blocked by the office's directors. Frustrated, and lacking alternatives, an impassioned Mosley - in what would eventually become his most famous parliamentary address – pleaded to the House of Commons for political action:

I begged the government to make up its mind how much it was prepared to spend on unemployment, how much money it could find, and then to allocate the money available according to the best objects we could discover. As it is, no such system has even been adopted. Departments have come crowding along, jostling each other with their schemes, and, like bookmakers on the race course, the man who can push the hardest, make the most noise, and get through the turnstile first, gets away with the money. To grapple with this problem it is essential to have a revolution in the machinery of government.³⁰

Despite raucous applause, Mosley was unable to exact any measure of economic change.

Discouraged at the limited scope of the Labour Party's economic policy, Mosley refused

²⁹ Ibid, 81-138.

³⁰ Home Office, "Sir Oswald Mosley," September 28th, 1936, *Records of the Security Service*, KV 4-140, National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

to compromise. He was determined to usher in a revolution that restructured and streamlined Britain's political system; or, in his own words, create a "modern movement."³¹ To quench this unyielding aspiration, Mosley impetuously resigned from the Labour Party, creating a 'New Party.' His impatience proved disastrous. In the 1931 elections all twenty four 'New Party' candidates suffered a harrowing defeat. Mosley, in what was to be his last parliamentary speech, lamented the rigidity of his Parliamentary peers: "It seems to me that Britain in her crisis is being asked to turn her face to the wall and to give up like an old woman who knows that she has to die. I want to see this country at least make an effort. I do not believe, and never have believed, in the cure of fasting but in the cure of effort. I believe that the way out is not the way of the monk but the way of the athlete...I venture to suggest that the simple question before the House in this debate is whether Great Britain is to meet its crisis lying down or standing up."³² After his defeat, a frustrated Mosley sought a modern political ideology that offered answers.³³

His questions took him to Italy, where Mosley studied Mussolini's Fascist state. In October of 1922 the Italian Fascist Party, under the guidance of Mussolini, ordered their 'Blackshirts' to take control of public institutions in and around Rome. The Italian government, led by a leftist coalition, proved too fractured to respond effectively. King Victor Emmanuel III, hoping to avoid conflict, appointed Mussolini Prime Minister. Fascist Propaganda, in the aftermath of this "seizure," collectively celebrated the Fascist

³¹ Dorril, 39.

³² Ibid, 52.

³³ Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 224-244.

victory as the “March on Rome,” thrusting fascism almost overnight into the international limelight.

Utilizing his aristocratic background, Mosley engineered meetings with several prominent Italian Fascists, including Mussolini himself. During these encounters, Mosley developed a strong admiration of fascist tenets, specifically the emergence of a strong leader, the creation of a single party state, corporatist perspectives, and a communal cultural identity. The corporatist state in particular – created and later implemented under Mussolini – proved exceptionally appealing to Mosley. It would, according to historian Stanley Payne, “integrate all social and economic forces, but it was not to be rigidly centralized or despotic, permitting limited pluralism and a degree of economic decentralization.”³⁴ A far cry, indeed, from what Mosley considered the stifling bureaucracy of government hindering capitalism.

In due course, the meteoric rise of Mussolini – combined with the seemingly ordained emergence of Hitler – seduced Mosley’s desire for power. In the wake of World War I, with economic collapse debilitating Europe, fascism had evocatively emerged as a popular and effective political ideology. The much romanticized “March on Rome” had awarded to the fascist ideology an international vanguard, while the spectacular ascension of Hitler only further validated fascist legitimacy. Consequently, even in England, with its strong constitutional history, clamors for fascist tenets emerged. In 1934, during his first meeting in addressing the National Government’s platform, Stanley Baldwin (Lord President of the Council, past and future Prime Minister) acknowledged the contemporary popularity accorded to fascism: “You know quite well there are many

³⁴ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 279.

people in this country who are beginning to cry out for something spectacular on the part of the Government. There is a feeling that desires a change...the fact that they [the Fascists] talk as they do, the fact that the Press pay so much attention to what they say, shows that that feeling does exist in the country.”³⁵

Earlier that year, Lieutenant-Colonel A.H. Gault, M.P. Taunton, in his presidential address to the Taunton Divisional Council of the Junior Imperial League, expressed a similar sentiment: “under certain eventualities it is possible you and I may eventually become Fascists. All I hope, is that the need for us to become extremists will never arise. I don’t think it will in England, because of our constitutional history.”³⁶ Fascism, for all intents and purposes, had developed into a potent political force. Mosley, while seeking answers in Italy, succumbed to his impetuosity and embraced it, hoping to capitalize on the ideology’s growing (though ultimately fleeting) popularity. Upon his return to England in 1931, Mosley was convinced Fascism provided the ultimate means for English political salvation. In an article published in Lady Houston’s *Saturday Review*, Mosley ebulliently praised “this Fascism [that] challenges alike the ‘Right’ and the ‘Left’ of old world politics. It has produced not only a new system of government, but also a new type of man, who differs from politicians of the old world as men from another planet.”³⁷ With a newfound ideological vigor, Mosley set about preparing his ‘March on London.’

Using his title, money, and political background, Mosley began a campaign designed to unite the scattered Fascist movements already existing in England. The oldest

³⁵ “House of Commons,” *The London Times*, May 1, 1934.

³⁶ “Unionist MP and Fascism,” *The London Times*, May, 14, 1934.

³⁷ Cross, 57.

of these organizations, the British Fascists (BF), formed in 1923 under the direction of Miss Rotha Lintorn-Orman (grand-daughter of Field Marshall Lintorn). The movement was originally named the 'British Fascisti' (in homage to Italian Fascism), but eventually changed under Brigadier-General R.G.D. Blakeney to 'British Fascists.' Created primarily as a reactionary movement against socialism and communism, the British Fascists lacked a coherent ideology. Party philosophy rested exclusively on defending King and Parliament while attempting to exterminate communism, socialism, and anarchism. In some instances, the British Fascists even defined themselves as strictly 'non-political.' Though not unilaterally anti-Semitic, elements of xenophobia and racial scapegoating were present. By 1924, the movement claimed some 100,000 members, though actual numbers were much lower. Lintorn-Orman, by this point, had faded into the background, and cheerfully capitulated party presidency to Brigadier-General R.G.D. Blakeney, who promptly incorporated the British Fascists into a private company.

Though more organized, Blakeney did little to develop party ideology; and eventually retrogressed into mild anti-Semitic contentions, at one point arguing "a gang of internationalists seek to control the world."³⁸ In 1926, Blakeney sent Admiral Armstrong, the party's second in command, as part of a delegation intending to study the organizational elements of Italian Fascism (as well as ingratiate the BF to Mussolini). However, that same year a general strike ruptured party loyalties – with Blakeney proving too moderate for his constituency – and led to Blakeney and Armstrong's resignation. Lintorn-Orman, in response, reclaimed active leadership, though the party would never again enjoy any semblance of organizational success. By 1932, remnants of

³⁸ Dorril, 60.

the BF endured, and proved ripe for prompt assimilation into Mosley's newly formed British Union of Fascists.³⁹

Perhaps the British Fascists' most indelible characteristic was its fractious membership base. At several times throughout BF history, splinter organizations – unhappy with the party's direction – emerged in opposition to the BF. At one point the 'British Empire Fascists', the 'Fascist League', and the 'Fascist Movement' – "pocket movements under pocket Mussolinis,"⁴⁰ – stood in opposition to the British Fascists. The most critical divide, however, occurred in 1925, when one hundred of the most active British Fascist members splintered and formed the 'British Fascisti.' Donning a black uniform and proclaiming "remember your oath," the newly incarnated British Fascisti committed thuggish, brutish, but ultimately inconsequential street-vandalism against Labour and the left. Eventually, the British Fascisti disbanded and reformed as the 'British National Fascists,' though the change did little to dissuade their (quite deserved) uncouth reputation. The movement would eventually splinter again into the 'United Empire of Fascists under the Serocold Skeels', the 'British Empire Fascists', and a conglomeration of the 'British National Fascists' and the 'Ku-Klux-Klan.' Ironically, the British National Fascists infiltrated and disrupted a meeting held by Mosley at Cambridge in 1927. As more and more splinter organizations emerged, any vestige of power was divided among competing movements, leaving only the BF with any measure (however minimal) of political resonance. However, upon his return from Italy, a reinvigorated Mosley offered these fragmented organizations something they lacked: a dynamic, charismatic leader capable of uniting all fascists under a single banner. Doing just that,

³⁹ Cross, 30-65.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 61.

Mosley absorbed the BF and its many subsidiaries, creating a consolidated Fascist movement – the British Union of Fascists – directly under his control.⁴¹

The lone remaining fascist movement, the Imperial Fascists (organized under the direction of retired veterinary surgeon Arnold Leese) openly contested the formation of the British Union of Fascists. Leese, a former member of the British Fascists, championed a remarkably coherent ideology emulating German Nazism. Though never possessing more than 150 adherents, Leese's movement proved well organized and remarkably loyal. Imperial Fascists were the first to don the black shirt, and even recruited former British Fascist leader Brigadier-General Blakeney. As part of their political program, the Imperial Fascists advocated a three point policy: acknowledgement of the failure of democracy, the development of a political caste, and the corporatist state. Yet, on a fundamental level, violent anti-Semitism was the primary pre-requisite for attaining membership. In 1932, upon the formation of the BUF, Mosley approached the Imperial Fascists about absorption; but only under a strict program of restrictions. Chief among these qualifications was Mosley's unquestioning leadership over organization and policy. Leese, however, rejected Mosley's offer almost immediately.

As a result, with two fascist movements – similarly named and almost identically dressed – the public found it difficult to distinguish between the BUF and the Imperial Fascists. From a public relations standpoint, this proved disastrous; the Imperial Fascists perpetrated violent anti-Semitic transgressions across all of London (sometimes under the deliberate guise of BUF members). Eventually, Mosley simply decided to ignore the

⁴¹ Ibid, 48-78.

Imperial Fascists, a move warranted by their bankruptcy in 1935.⁴² Although Leese maintained his anti-Semitic vigor – chief amongst his claims was that the BUF was created as part of an ingenious Jewish conspiracy designed to attract attention away from his own movement – the BUF by 1935 had firmly established itself as the lone significant Fascist movement in England. With this de facto unification in place, Mosley soon turned his efforts to political advancement.⁴³

Mosley's early efforts, however, met with a certain measure of antagonism. Early meetings of the BUF encountered considerable opposition from Communist organizations (which, quite naturally, associated British Fascist ideology with Italian and German Fascism). In response, Mosley created a paramilitary coalition of stewards commonly referred to as "Blackshirts."⁴⁴ With this protection, Mosley more freely spread his movement's ideology. In a context of worldwide economic crisis, Mosley's innovative and radical economic reform policy garnered not only high praise, but awarded a measure of legitimacy to Mosley's fledgling party. Indeed, public perception of the BUF movement strengthened Mosley's political standing. In an article printed in 1934, the *Manchester Guardian* portrayed British Fascism as a political movement on the rise, free from bigotry, and eager to embrace the change economic instability might create:

The movement has rapidly grown; it has branches all over the country; it has large funds, a huge membership, and now that Viscount Rothermere has given it his support, it presumably has a powerful press...outwardly the party resembles the Italian model rather than the German one. The shirt is black, not

⁴² Several of these violent anti-Semites eventually migrated to British Union of Fascist ranks.

⁴³ Dorril, 174-210.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 218-242.

brown...Mosley's policy bears no trace of this [Nazi] hysteria, and indeed, compared with the Nazi programme, it looks uncommonly staid and severe.⁴⁵

Beneficial depictions, combined with aristocratic support, attests to the perception of viability within the British public. At this early stage, the movement lacked substantial influence, but was perceived to operate through existing channels, gaining a constituency through conventional and non-racist means.

The *Times* generously portrayed this pursuit of political support as a movement of the younger generation. At a rally in Birmingham on January 21, 1934, the *Times*' correspondent favorably differentiated the Fascist movement from its older counterparts: "One respect in which it differed from other great gatherings was that it was predominantly youthful, although there were more than a sprinkling of middle aged participants. A number of young women were present. Many sympathizers came from London and Manchester, and big contingents from Midland towns."⁴⁶ The speech delivered by Mosley, according to the correspondent, "was heard with attention" by his youthful and energetic audience. The portrayal by the *Times*, one of a normal political movement embraced by the young, accentuates the legitimacy bestowed upon the early Fascist movement. No mention of Fascist brutality or anti-Semitism appeared at this time; and with nearly 40,000 members – the most the movement would ever enjoy – Mosley appeared destined for prominence.⁴⁷

Seeking to capitalize on his growing political power, Mosley engineered a series of rallies during the first half of 1934 designed to illustrate Fascist strength and attract

⁴⁵ "The Fascists in Britain. Sir Oswald Mosley's Movement. A Coming Factor?" *The Manchester Guardian*, January, 21, 1934.

⁴⁶ "Fascist Creed," *The London Times*, January, 21, 1934.

⁴⁷ Dorril, 120-168.

potential members. The culmination of these meetings took place in June 1934 at Olympia Hall. BUF advertising glorified Olympia, transforming it from a political rally into a social event. The worldwide fervor over recent fascist triumphs in both Italy and Germany enhanced Mosley's political standing. "Mosley preaches," wrote the *Manchester Guardian*, "the ideal of the complete corporate state, a regulated economic life, and an observer will notice how subtly he has stolen the thunder both of the Left and the Right."⁴⁸ As a result of fascist legitimacy, several aristocratic and popular members of society – much to Mosley's delight – bought advanced tickets to the 'must see' show. The incredible exposure, though attracting an aristocratic audience, also raised the ire of a frustrated Communist Party.⁴⁹

Hours before the rally was set to begin, riotous communists enveloped the entrance to Olympia Hall. The police, struggling to hold back the hecklers, offered little support to the arriving guests. The aristocratic attendees, drawn to Olympia as a social occasion, were mortified by the vitriolic affronts screamed in their direction. Once inside, their horror continued. From the moment Mosley approached the podium, communists in the audience began shouting in protest. Mosley, in response, halted his speech, waiting for BUF spotlights to shine on protesters. Blackshirt stewards then beat the hecklers, dragging them from the rally. This sequence continued for nearly two hours, with non-BUF elements in attendance horrified at the brutal tactics employed by fascist stewards.

⁴⁸ "The Fascists in Britain. Sir Oswald Mosley's Movement. A Coming Factor?" *The Manchester Guardian*, January, 21, 1934.

⁴⁹ Dorril, 295-304.

As John Gilmour, M.P. Glasgow Pollock, put it: “the leopard might change his shirt [a reference to BUF Blackshirts], but not his spots.”⁵⁰

When the rally ended (four hours later than scheduled), word of fascist terror spread through England. The following morning, dozens of newspapers portrayed the fascists as political bullies intent on dominating their way to power. Several established a connection to Adolf Hitler and German National Socialism. This link proved detrimental when, later that month, the Night of the Long Knives in Germany horrified the majority of British society.⁵¹ Indeed, in the months that followed Olympia, the explicit revelation of Mosley’s anti-Semitic ideology greatly hindered Fascist political viability.

This viability, however, was never warranted. From its inception, the British Union of Fascists carried the same anti-Semitic and repressive qualities that were revealed at the Olympia Rally. Though not previously expressing anti-Semitic tendencies – preceding his establishment of the BUF Mosley exhibited virtually no anti-Semitism – Mosley after Olympia nonetheless adopted the ideology as a means to attract potential recruits. Indeed, as early as the formation of the New Party, anti-Semitism was present within ideology. Mosley, however, strictly forbade any explicit articulation of this racism. He, for all intents and purposes, engineered an over-compensatory and preemptive advertising campaign designed to convince Britain of BUF tolerance. “From the inception of the British Union of Fascists,” boasted an anonymous BUF correspondent in April 1933, “our Leader issued strict orders that there was to be no form of Jew-baiting, and has emphasized frequently that the movement is in no way Anti-

⁵⁰ “The Meeting at Olympia - Blackshirts and Interrupters,” *The London Times*, June, 12, 1934.

⁵¹ A series of political killings committed by -- and designed to consolidate power under -- Adolf Hitler.

Semitic. The fact that a large number of Jews in England would appear to be anti-Fascist does not alter that position, and will not cause us to deviate from our policy.”⁵² As a result of this propaganda campaign, the anti-Semitism of the BUF remained dormant for nearly two years. So much so, that a 1933 article in *Jewish World* disparaged attacks (committed under the pretense of alleged BUF anti-Semitism) perpetrated by Jewish Communists against the BUF, calling their actions “wicked and stupid and are condemned outright by all decent men of our faith.”⁵³

However, the aftermath of Olympia rendered any concealment efforts inert; the general public witnessed first-hand the reality of BUF anti-Semitism. With his hand essentially forced, Mosley chose to embrace the anti-Semitism of his party: “I openly and publicly challenge,” Mosley boasted, “the Jewish interest of this country, commanding commerce, commanding the Press, commanding the cinema, dominating the City of London, killing industry with their sweat shops. These great interests are not intimidating, and will not intimidate, the Fascist movement of our modern age.”⁵⁴ This decision – to condemn Britain’s Jewish presence – proved politically irrevocable. Mosley would never again command the attention and power he so desperately craved.

With this explicit racism surging through the BUF collective consciousness, Mosley in the second half of 1934 dramatically altered his political ideology. Previously suppressed racial tenets came to influence, and indeed dictate, the development of BUF doctrine. From an international perspective, Mosley’s formerly unarticulated foreign policy began to develop under the guidance of his now uninhibited anti-Semitism. This

⁵² “Fascism and the Jews,” *Blackshirt*, April, 1, 1933.

⁵³ “Editorial,” *Blackshirt*, June 16, 1933.

⁵⁴ “Sir Oswald Mosley and the Jews,” *The London Times*, April, 15, 1935.

foreign policy, however, offered in large part only unquestioned support of Italy and Germany. Indeed, much to the detriment of international policy refinement, domestic affairs still largely dominated party ideology. Anti-Semitism proved the primary culprit, as it impeded post-Olympia BUF policy formation, and proved a captivating and dramatic exhibit for all of Britain.

In addition to devastating his domestic credibility – indeed, by the end of 1935 the BUF had less than 8,000 active members – anti-Semitic radicalization also drastically affected Mosley’s perception abroad.⁵⁵ As national loyalties withered around him – a direct consequence of his flagrant racism – Mosley began recruiting support abroad. Quite naturally, Mosley had inculcated a strong relationship with his ideological mentor: Mussolini. Yet, as early as April of 1933, Mosley had initiated a campaign disassociating his movement from Italy, while simultaneously aligning himself with Adolf Hitler and Germany. Indeed, the seemingly foundational connection to Italian Fascism was eliminated. No mention of Mussolini or the Italian State graced the pages of BUF propaganda; only Hitler and his violently anti-Semitic Nazism. Always an admirer of Hitler’s rise to prominence, Mosley soon adopted facets of Hitler’s radical ideology. He glorified the Fuhrer, repeatedly extolling Hitler’s battle against the alleged manipulation of Judaism:

Jews have now organized as a racial minority within the [British] State to conduct a furious agitation with all the force of their great money power, which can have no effect except to drag this country toward war with Germany...But we believe that beyond even this factor is the consideration that Germany, for reasons of her own, has suppressed the great Jewish interest which previously dominated that nation by their control of all the old Parties of the State.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt* (London: Penguin, 2006), 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

This struggle against Jewish domination, according to Mosley, pitted a beneficial revolutionary in Hitler combating an international finance “controlled by Jews. No one, no country, no people can fight against the money, said the Jews. We will strangle your export trade. We will take away your credit. We will smash you through the columns of the capitalist press. And Hitler, tightening his lips, said, in effect, ‘shoot.’”⁵⁷ These tenets, explicated in April 1933, reveal the inchoate fragments of Mosley’s eventual foreign policy. Though concentrating almost exclusively on domestic developments, Mosley nonetheless offered snippets of his future program. However, as his party transitioned – in the wake of Olympia – from implicit to explicit anti-Semitism, Mosley further constricted party ideology to domestic affairs (primarily the securing of Parliamentary representation). Yet, only six months after Olympia, international events demanded the BUF’s attention. Accordingly, Mosley began cultivating his foreign policy and, along with it, his connection to Germany (and, to a lesser extent, Italy). His international program, though still largely undefined, by 1935 had coalesced around the tenets of anti-Semitism and German-Italian accordance.

These compelling – yet rarely explicated – tenets manifested primarily as cryptic conspiracy-theories surrounding Jews and ‘international-finance.’ Indeed, though lacking any semblance of evidence, Mosley nonetheless engineered sporadic and baseless attacks against the suspected machinations of Jewry. In a pamphlet intended to educate the public on British Fascism, Mosley attacked the alleged nefarious influence of Judaism: “The Tory Party surrendered the historic principles of British Foreign Policy to conciliate the Jews who hated Germany and the Internationalists who aimed at the overthrow of both

⁵⁷ “The Peculiar Case of Mr. Panter,” *Blackshirt*, November 18, 1933.

the German and Italian regimes...the Communists even, virtually abandoned any distinctive internal social policy in order to secure a 'united front' upon which might ultimately be based a European democratic coalition for the defense of the frontiers of Communist Russia."⁵⁸ Up until 1936, Mosley found international relations relatively straightforward: Jews and Communists sought to manipulate Europe into annihilating Fascism. Accordingly, Mosley conducted unsubstantiated counter-attacks against them.

Not stopping there, Mosley unconditionally supported Italian and German foreign policy initiatives. In October of 1935, Italian soldiers invaded Ethiopia in an attempt to acquire colonial property outside of Europe. Although Italy's attack was blatant and unprovoked, the League of Nations could do little to prevent the invasion, exposing the League's inherent weakness. Throughout this 'Abyssinian Crisis,' Mosley enthusiastically supported Mussolini – the clear aggressor – in his unwarranted invasion: "I believe that Italy will conquer Abyssinia easily and quickly,"⁵⁹ Mosley passionately exclaimed in a 1935 speech. After Italy had conquered Ethiopia, the BUF continued to support Italian aggression by justifying their invasion: "The League's offer to Italy was to abandon all claims to what Abyssinia had promised her in previous treaties, and to pass over the enslavement and murder of her subjects."⁶⁰ The BUF, in their argument, intentionally misconstrued events so as to rationalize Italian invasion as a defensive maneuver (to prevent enslavement and murder). Even without this motivation, however, Britain, according to the BUF, lacked any impetus for involvement. The British people,

⁵⁸ Sir Oswald Mosley, *100 Questioned, Asked and Answered*, 31.

⁵⁹ NA: KV 4-140/26/11, Home Office, "Sir Oswald Mosley," December 19th, 1935, *Records of the Security Service*.

⁶⁰ E.D. Hart, "What's Wrong with the League of Nations: Italy's Case Against the League" *Action*, June 4th, 1936, University of Birmingham Special Collections (hereafter UBSC), Birmingham.

for the most part, simply did not care about war in Ethiopia. “The working class of Britain,” wrote BUF correspondent John Emery, “has never cared twopence about Haile Selassie any more than they cared about Menelik or Cetewayo or the Mad Mullah, all of whom were black monarchs deposed before Selassie...if the British working class cannot summon up any enthusiasm for a black fighter when a war is on, then they are not likely to do it after he has bolted and left his troops to their fate.”⁶¹ This contention, in particular, subscribed to Mosley’s underlying belief of British isolationism. Why should Britain risk lives and entangle itself in foreign disputes the British people have no interest in?

The British Government, in its actions towards Abyssinia, ostensibly concurred with Mosley. In November of 1935, as Italian-Abyssinian tensions approached a breaking point, Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare discussed with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval the proposed concession of a large majority of Abyssinia to Italy. Once this information leaked, however, the public outcry was significant enough to force Hoare to resign. Nonetheless, Hoare’s successor, Anthony Eden, along with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, pursued a policy of placation towards Italy. “Eden not only accepted them,” wrote Neville Chamberlain describing the terms of surrender, “but suggested that we should ourselves propose the removal of sanctions [towards Italy].”⁶² Samuel Hoare, in his assessment of this placation, perhaps best synthesized both his and Chamberlain’s assessment of the British Government’s actions: “I believe that we have done everything possible to keep in step with the French and to do nothing that will provoke the

⁶¹ UBSC: John Emery, “The World of Labour,” *Action*, June 4th, 1936.

⁶² NA: CAB 140/149/23, Neville Chamberlain to Samuel Hoare, June 17th, 1936. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

Italians.”⁶³ Indeed, in avoiding the provocation of Fascist governments, the British Government pursued – albeit inchoate in nature – a policy of appeasement.

Mosley, for the most part, offered little in the way of a discernable response to the Government’s actions. Despite heaping unqualified praise on Germany and Italy, Mosley in 1935 lacked much in the way of a consistent international program. His foreign policy proved largely reactionary; and in many respects paralleled the radicalization of his movement. Indeed, as the BUF marched inexorably to violent anti-Semitism, a pro-German international ideology eventually followed. This foreign policy, however, remained predominantly unrefined. The domestic affects of the depression dictated the majority of BUF policy formation. It was only when international tensions exploded – at the outset of the Spanish Civil War – that Mosley began to refine his foreign policy.

⁶³ NA: CAB 140/149/23, Samuel Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, August 18th, 1935. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

II. AN INCHOATE ACCORDANCE: MOSLEY AND CHAMBERLAIN IN 1936-1937

The Spanish Civil War began in July 1936 when a group of Army generals instigated a coup against the Second Spanish Republic.⁶⁴ The Nationalists – tentatively comprised of monarchists, *Falangists*, Carlists, and the Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right (CEDA) – united under a banner of anti-Communist, pro-Catholic centralism. The existing government (the republic) initially championed democratic self-determinism, but, with the infusion of communists, anarchists, and Marxists, eventually sought to institute a pseudo-Soviet people’s republic. The ruptures created by these two extremes often left friends and even families divided amongst one another. This passionate ideological fervor also translated to the battlefield, where the warfare proved ferocious. Indeed, Spain was utterly devastated by the brutal tactics of both sides. Mass executions, terror bombing, and long range artillery destroyed both civilian and city alike.⁶⁵ The rest of Europe, and indeed the world, perceived the conflict as a microcosm for the ideological battle between fascism and communism. Along these lines, different European Governments initiated the importation of money, weapons, and troops to both the Republic and Nationalists. Fearing a second international war, the League of Nations created the Non-Intervention Committee to discourage outside interference. This committee, however, proved a colossal failure; Germany and Italy continued to aid the

⁶⁴ In recent years historians have debated the start date of the War, with some placing it as early as the 1933 parliamentary elections.

⁶⁵ 115,000: A conservative estimate of mass executions committed by both sides (300,000 total died as a result of the war).

Nationalists while the Soviet Union sustained their support of the republic. The British Government, a champion of non-intervention, essentially observed as foreign involvement dictated the outcome in Spain. Eventually, as the Nationalists marched closer to Madrid (the republic's capital), General Francisco Franco emerged as their unquestioned leader. Using his considerable military and political acumen, Franco further united the Right and eventually led the Nationalists to victory. After the war, Franco forcefully combined the various elements of the right under his control, and created the Fascist party *Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (Falange).⁶⁶

At the outset of the Spanish Civil War, Mosley, wary of the international entanglements that led Britain into World War I, advocated a sphere-of-influence program that essentially excised Britain from European affairs. Proclaiming “Britain for the British,” Mosley contended Eastern Europe lacked relevance to Britain and, consequently, should be relatively ignored. Western Europe, by contrast, had succumbed to the manipulation of international finance. This alleged Jewish (and Communist) cabal, Mosley argued, sought to entangle Britain in a complicated web of alliances calculated to incite war against the one country that had expunged their pernicious influence: Germany.

Within this isolationist underpinning, Mosley soon introduced the existing concepts of anti-Semitism and German/Italian aggrandizement. Indeed, these three tenets – alleged Jewish deprecation, Italian and German aggrandizement, and ‘British for the British’ – formed the foundation of Mosley’s foreign policy, and, at their core, were

⁶⁶ Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 148-215.

constructed to placate and essentially buttress German foreign policy. This ideological synergy, in many instances, led to callous BUF criticism of the supposed anti-German British government. Stanley Baldwin and Anthony Eden, in particular, received nearly weekly diatribes condemning their belligerent international policy. However, in 1936-37 – and particularly after the May 1937 appointment of Chamberlain as Prime Minister – the emergent thrust of appeasement inculcated a sense of accord within fascist ranks. For the first time, politicians within Parliament – namely, the ‘appeasers’ – championed a foreign policy remarkable similar to Mosley’s. Indeed, though still decrying the likes of Baldwin and Eden, the British Union of Fascists, with Mosley at the helm, articulated a political agenda in seeming accord with the appeasement-driven foreign policy of Chamberlain. Though this harmony would climax in 1938, under the auspices of Anglo-German tensions, the years 1936 and 1937 nonetheless saw an inchoate and gradual synergy develop between the politics of Mosley and Chamberlain.

Mosley’s extremist interpretation of common tenets, however – a corollary of his espousal of violent anti-Semitism – largely impeded any explicit agreement between him and Chamberlain. Exacerbating this unwitting synchronism, Chamberlain, for his part, generally lacked the impetus and political clout to instill his appeasement-led policies. Consequently, though the two generally acceded in principle, and in many instances against Government policy, any semblance of overt accord would dissipate until 1938, when the thrust of Chamberlain’s appeasement coalesced with Mosley’s desperation to avoid war. Until this point, however, they remained locked, however unwitting of each other’s presence, in a battle to placate Germany.

Mosley, frustrated at the seemingly fatalistic outlook of this battle, consistently lambasted the British Government's alleged anti-German orientation. Indeed, other than Chamberlain and a few other 'appeasers,' Mosley unilaterally decried the belligerency and buffoonery of Parliament. The bulk of this government directed vitriol concentrated on Britain's non-interventionist policy towards the Spanish Civil War, though Anglo-German relations would remain omnipresent in the fascist collective consciousness. Indeed, throughout 1936-37 Mosley advanced a foreign policy framed around callous derision of proposed Government intervention in the Spanish Civil War, conspiratorial diatribes against the Jew-ridden British press, a peace-at-all costs approach with Germany, and mordant criticism of Parliament's complacency (and in some instances, belligerency).

At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, despite possessing little knowledge of Spanish politics, the BUF quickly and accurately gauged the scope of the conflict. An anonymous party correspondent, living in Spain, immediately wrote to the official BUF organ *Action*:

The most important fact about the battle which is being fought in Spain is that it is part of a war in which the life of Europe and the future of civilization are at stake. It is not a domestic conflict, or one that has broken out owing to purely national circumstances...in the widest sense it is but an incident in the development of the general plot against authority and patriotism, launched in some nations sooner than in others, and nowhere with more deadly purpose or in a more terrible manner than in Spain.⁶⁷

With the stakes appropriately set – and the fate of Europe at hand – Mosley set about utilizing Spain to garner support for his own movement. Accordingly, he instituted a shift in party policy designed to educate British Fascists on the Spanish situation. Much like

⁶⁷ "Present and Forward: The Fight to Save Spain," *Action*, July 23rd, 1936, University of Birmingham Special Collections (hereafter UBSC), Birmingham.

the anonymous correspondent, Mosley framed the outbreak of hostilities in Spain as an inevitable ideological battle that would eventually seize Britain: “The causes must be removed and the troubles of the people cured, while the Jews and dupe leaders are placed firmly under restraint. That is why Italy and Germany have dealt successfully with their problems and Spain has failed. It would not appear from reading this British ‘kept’ Press that we in this country are faced with a similar problem. Those who investigate conditions know, however, that it is very real.”⁶⁸ In the aftermath of the attempted coup, Mosley sought to polarize the plurality of ideologies within Britain and essentially divide the political spectrum into communist and fascist camps (much like Spain). Accordingly, the collective fear of Communist Spain, and its paralleled emergence in Britain, would drive the majority of Britain to Fascism. Though largely unsuccessful, Mosley’s fear campaign nonetheless increased membership, and established a precedent for the vitriolic campaign waged against “Red Spain.”

Less than one week after war broke out, the BUF ascribed unilateral culpability for the conflict to the Second Spanish Republic. “Red Atrocities,” wrote John Becket, “have brought forth armed reaction, and armed reaction has roused the Left to fresh atrocities.”⁶⁹ According to the BUF, the Soviet Union, in conjunction with the ‘Republican Government,’ terrorized the populace until they collectively chose to fight back. As a result, the Nationalists were not conniving insurgents, but brave, patriotic, and morally centered ‘freedom fighters.’ They sought to eliminate the pernicious influences of democracy and communism, and establish a modern movement: “it is a war between the equally sterile forces of Communism and reaction. On one side are the long-repressed

⁶⁸ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Mob Rule” *Action*, July 23rd, 1936.

⁶⁹ UBSC: John Becket, “Warning from Spain,” *Action*, July 23rd, 1936.

Spanish people grasping with desperation at the specious promises of Communism, while on the other side are the rich and privileged subsidizing the military adventurers in a desperate attempt to restore despotism in Spain.”⁷⁰ For the BUF, the war pitted the will of the people against the will of Communist authoritarianism.

Interestingly enough, in the early stages of war Mosley and the BUF downplayed the inchoate connection between the Spanish Nationalists and fascism. R. Gordon Canning, BUF specialist on foreign affairs, criticized the British Press for distilling Spain into Communist and Fascist sectors: “Spain has been called by most of the British Press a struggle between Communism and Fascism. This is quite incorrect. Fascism is only in the embryo stage in Spain, and the patriotic forces arrayed against the Red Government in Madrid consist mainly of, and are certainly led by, the monarchial and military groups.”⁷¹ Mosley himself echoed this point in a later article, claiming “fascism in Spain is but a small and weak ally of the Right forces...it is, therefore, by no means healthy for British Fascism to give unbalanced sympathy to the Spanish forces of the Right, except in so far as the leaders of these forces do appeal *today* on behalf of the Spanish people, and desire to exterminate not the rights and recognition of the Spanish peasant, but that unholy power of alien Communism.”⁷² Mosley never explicated the rationale behind advocating against ‘unbalanced sympathy’ (an argument he rarely abided by). It is evident, however, that Mosley did so primarily out of fear. Within the context of the Communism versus Fascism paradigm, Mosley feared a decisive and embarrassing loss for the ‘fascist’ Nationalists. This would have demonstrated Communism’s inherent superiority over

⁷⁰ UBSC: John Becket, “A lesson from Spain,” *Action*, August 6th, 1936.

⁷¹ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “Blood Drenched Spain: Bull Ring of Civil War,” *Action*, August 13th, 1936.

⁷² UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Spain and Europe” *Action*, August 13th, 1936.

Fascism, and proved a devastating blow to both European and British Fascism. As a result, in the early stages of the war the BUF sought to mitigate a potential Nationalist defeat, warning all of Britain that “while earnest in our hopes for a defeat of Communism in Spain, we British Fascists must beware of accepting all anti-Communists as Fascists.”⁷³

Despite the Nationalists’ pseudo-fascist ideology, Mosley no doubt hoped for their eventual victory over the Republican Communists. Yet, as part of his foreign policy development, Mosley nonetheless maintained his ‘Britain for the British’ sphere-of-influence doctrine. One week after the outbreak of hostilities, the Labour Party proposed some level of interference in Spain. They, like many in Parliament, felt compelled to assist a fully-recognized and established government; particularly one dispatching passionate appeals for British intervention and politically aligned with the left. Pio Quiroga, president of a large division within the Republican railway system, was but one in a mosaic of impassioned appeals that “request from your honorable [British] government the restoration of the international right of the Spanish Republic, the rejection of belligerent rights for Franco, and the immediate removal of all foreign combatants.”⁷⁴ Yet Mosley, strictly opposed to any intervention, passionately argued against this proposal, contending “that form of insanity which creates a fiendish desire to interfere in the affairs of other people at the expense of its country’s interests was again

⁷³ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “Blood Drenched Spain: Bull Ring of Civil War,” *Action*, August 13th, 1936.

⁷⁴ Pio Quiroga to Neville Chamberlain, January 12th, 1938, *Records Created and Inherited by the Foreign Office*, FO 371-24114, National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

Quote translated by author: “Seccional de U ferroviaria de Laboulaye, pide a su digno gobierno restablezca derecho internacional para republica Espanola rechazo reconocimient beligerante a Franco y exija retiro inmediato de todos los combatientes extranjeros.”

manifested by our International Socialists this week. Britain can only be grateful that this traitorous Party does not hold the reins of Government in its hands.”⁷⁵

Neville Chamberlain, in a letter written in July of 1937, ostensibly shared Mosley’s assessment. For appeasers, Spain proved nothing more than a platform from which a much larger and significantly more devastating war could possibly emerge. Accordingly, Chamberlain and his ideological cohorts pursued appeasement (manifested as non-intervention) to prevent this international war. “We are still at a deadlock over Spain,” wrote Chamberlain, “but the protagonists seem remarkably calm and we shall go on trying to keep up the façade which at any rate preserves us from a European Conflict.”⁷⁶ Despite their inchoate accordance, both failed to recognize the ideological synergy developing between their politics.

Regardless, the British Government – under the direction of Baldwin and Eden – pursued appeasement, and created the Non-Intervention Committee to (in theory) prevent intervention in Spain: “The Governments of Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy and Portugal, should join the United Kingdom and French Governments in declaring their absolute determination to renounce forthwith all direct or indirect action which might in any way be calculated to lead to foreign intervention in relation to the conflict in Spain.”⁷⁷ Despite their agreement on the implementation of Non-Intervention, Mosley and the British Government in 1936 and 1937 encountered only sparing opportunities for further accordance. Indeed, on many levels historians have contended that “by turning a

⁷⁵ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Labour’s Castles in Spain,” *Action*, July 30th, 1936.

⁷⁶ NA: CAB 140/149/29, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, July 24th, 1936. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

⁷⁷ NA: DO 35/161/4, ‘Committee for Non-Intervention’ to Stanley Baldwin, May 12th, 1936. *Records created or inherited by the Dominions Office, and of the Commonwealth Relations and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices*.

blind eye to the intervention of dictators the British Government aided Franco as decisively as if it had sent arms to him.”⁷⁸ Yet, despite this, the British Government and Mosley – though coveting a similar end – simply could not agree on a means. Mosley contended that Non-Intervention had to be intensified, to the point that Britain would essentially excise itself from European affairs. The British Government, on the other hand, sought primarily to placate international tensions in a bid to avoid another conflict. Ultimately, as Mosley witnessed first-hand the inefficacy of non-intervention, he admonished its existence, and urged Parliament to abandon the flaccid incarnation of appeasement.

Despite his steadfast promotion of British isolationism, Mosley nonetheless encouraged both Italy and Germany to intervene in Spanish affairs. Indeed, despite the fact that Mussolini and Hitler were the first to offer aid in Spain, Mosley supported their intervention under the irrational auspices of counter-reaction to France and the Soviet Union’s intervention: “Italy and Germany may find reasons to interfere in Spanish affairs. The Duce and the Reichsfuhrer, having banished Communism from their respective countries, cannot calmly contemplate the establishment of a Soviet regime both in France and Spain.”⁷⁹ BUF accusations of French and Soviet intervention – while simultaneously whitewashing the blatant intervention of Germany and Italy – developed into a frequent occurrence. “After a further series of undocumented accusations against these three powers [Germany, Italy, and Portugal]”, wrote R. Gordon Canning, “is unleashed by Maisky before the non-intervention Committee, the latter produces

⁷⁸ Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 215.

⁷⁹ UBSC: “Arms for Spain,” *Action*, August 27th, 1936.

evidence to show three definite infringements of the agreement by the Soviet Government itself.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Mosley and the BUF consistently argued that Germany and Italy only intervened to create some unquantifiable measure of intervention-equilibrium, while the Soviet Union and France nefariously plotted to install Communism in Spain. The British Government, upholding the tenets of appeasement, quite naturally opposed the BUF’s staunch approval of Italian and German intervention. In their cautious approach to the war, however, Baldwin and Eden did little to dissuade such actions; and not for a lack of knowledge. A plethora of information concerning intervention violations passed through the foreign office. Anthony Eden, in one particular instance, drawing attention to such blatant offenses, wrote to Lord Perth: “the Italian Government themselves are behaving in the most unneutral manner conceivable and are threatening to behave in an even more unneutral manner.”⁸¹ Yet, in unwaveringly ascribing to what Mosley considered a meek incarnation of appeasement, the British Government essentially rendered itself ineffectual in dealing with such violations.

With all of this unchecked intervention, a massive influx of foreign materials, armaments, and troops from Germany and Italy flooded the Nationalist armory. Mosley, in essence, got what he asked for in Italy and Germany’s large-scale intervention. Yet these actions were not without consequences. With German and Italian support, Mosley soon dramatically altered Fascist perceptions of the Nationalist insurgents. As early as September, 1936 the BUF ostensibly recognized the ramifications intervention created – namely, the growing influence, both internal and external, of Fascism on the Nationalists

⁸⁰ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “The Soviet Spider: The Truth About Russian Intrigue,” *Action*, October 31st, 1936.

⁸¹ NA: FO 371/24115/36, Anthony Eden to Lord Perth, January 17th, 1939, *Records Created and Inherited by the Foreign Office*.

– and quickly removed its ‘true fascist’ decree in favor of a much more biased approach. Indeed, only four months after war began the BUF initiated a propaganda campaign designed to increase support for the Nationalists. Foremost in this campaign was the reconnection of Fascism to the Nationalist ideology. Though previously disassociating the two, within the context of German and Italian intervention the BUF felt it necessary to emphasize the nascent connection: “The Fascist section of the insurgent forces has increased by leaps and bounds. Yet again we learn the lesson that enlightened propaganda can attain a national solidarity impossible to a purely reactionary movement...Fascist Spain will have fine material on which to rebuild when the scourges of Marxism and class-war have been eradicated.”⁸² Almost overnight, the somber tone of early war-time imagery gave way to optimism over Fascism’s seemingly ordained victory.

Chief amongst this ideological reversal was the BUF campaign aimed at convincing the British Government to bestow belligerent rights to the Nationalists. Since the Nationalist forces rebelled against an established and recognized government, Parliament had not, as late as 1938, recognized Franco’s political legitimacy. Yet, as Franco’s forces moved inexorably towards victory, the question developed an urgent primacy. “Beyond all doubt,” wrote one attendee at a Non-Intervention Committee, “the question of the grant of belligerent rights occupies in National Spain so outstanding a position as to dwarf in importance all other parts of the Committee’s plan.”⁸³ The BUF, frustrated at the British Government’s inherent bias against Fascism – and indeed, the BUF contended the government had succumbed to the manipulation of international

⁸² UBSC: John Becket, “News From Spain,” September 10th 1936.

⁸³ NA: CAB 62/85/47, Committee for Non-Intervention, “The Grant of Belligerent Rights a Fundamental Question of Principle in the Eyes of General Franco, November 17th, 1938, *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

finance – lambasted Baldwin and Eden: “Everyone knows that there is a very extensive war going on there – the casualties alone prove that. But the British Government has yet to hear of it! They have not yet given belligerent rights to General Franco, who has been commanding an army of half-a-million men for over a year against the ‘official’ Spanish Government, and holds nearly three-quarters of Spain.”⁸⁴ Despite the BUF’s vitriolic pleas, the British Government only recognized the Nationalist Government in the latter stages of 1939.

In 1937, with the Nationalist advance applying increasing pressure on the Republic, the BUF expanded its encouraging portrayals of the Franco-led Nationalists. *Action* published a March editorial that featured eye-witness testimonials confirming the positive, transformational effect Franco initiated within his territory: “The people I saw are happy and contented, they have plenty of food, and I was struck by the tremendous amount of building work going on. Scaffolding is everywhere, and men are busy rebuilding places damaged in the battles.”⁸⁵ Later that year, R. Gordon Canning echoed a similar sentiment. “I have seen for myself! Here is no tyrant, no military dictatorship, which tramples upon the people of Spain. Here is a Leader who is dedicated to the *service of his country*, whose first task is to purify Spanish soil from the foul destructive doctrines of Bolshevism and afterwards to build up a country wherein the people will be given that economic security of National Socialism.” The BUF, in many respects, employed similar tactics in describing Hitler and Mussolini as those used to portray Franco. Mosley’s calculated efforts to bolster Franco’s connection to Fascism and

⁸⁴ UBSC: Sandy McKee, “For Heaven’s Sake Face Facts,” *Action*, September 25th, 1937.

⁸⁵ UBSC: “In the New Spain: Testimonial from D. Francis Noon,” *Action*, May 8th, 1937.

(especially) victory simultaneously enhanced the international prestige of the BUF while providing another potential ally.

While conducting this campaign praising the political and military acumen of Franco, Mosley and the BUF simultaneously directed a torrid propaganda effort against the Communists. More than just ideological opponents, Communists proved Mosley's sincerest political enemies. Whether disrupting speeches, crashing marches, or vandalizing BUF property, the Communists in Britain incited an extreme hate within British Union ranks. Accordingly, Mosley and the Fascists transferred this impassioned disdain to Spanish Communists who, as early as 1936, the BUF accused of horrific acts. To rationalize and explicate the lack of coverage for these atrocities, the BUF claimed that a conspiratorial 'leftist' British press purposely ignored Republican violence: "with their usual love of peace [intentional sarcasm], the great bulk of the Press have ever since been doing their best to create ill-feeling between Great Britain on the one hand, and Germany and Italy on the other. Every scare headline that could be invented, every obviously stupid story, often contradicting an equally silly story of the week before, has been used to exacerbate public feeling."⁸⁶ Perhaps most damning of all – from the British Fascist perspective – was the leftist press' intentional misconstruing of territorial claims. "Every day during the past year," wrote Oswald Mosley, "the 'National' Press, the *Daily Worker* and the B.B.C. have told us of great 'Government' victories, of hurried retreats on the part of Franco's forces. Yet city after city they have been forced to admit has gone over to him with varying degrees of resistance."⁸⁷ In many cases, due to the

⁸⁶ UBSC: John Becket, "Iberian Adventures: Contradictory Spanish Press Stories," *Action*, January 16th, 1937.

⁸⁷ UBSC: Oswald Mosley, "A Sure Sign: The Beginning of the End of Spain," *Action*, September 4th, 1937.

unreliability of the biased media, the BUF supplied facts of their own. Though tangentially researched, rarely verified, and occasionally fabricated, the BUF nonetheless put forth its own data.

This information primarily concerned atrocities committed by the left. “6000 priests,” wrote an unnamed BUF correspondent, “have been murdered by the Communists in Spain since the beginning of the Civil War. 20,000 churches have been destroyed or sacked. Over 6,000 priests of the secular clergy alone have been murdered – an average of 40 percent in all dioceses, with a percent rising as high as 80 in some places.”⁸⁸ The BUF did not focus exclusively on Catholic atrocities. The second major tenet publicized by the BUF concerned the Spanish Government’s autonomy from the Soviet Union. Both the Republic and the war-time government, claimed Mosley, were under the looming control of Soviet Communism. Accordingly, those who fought for the Republic not only fought for foreign rule, but committed a measure of treason: “It is difficult to imagine how those who joined the Spanish Government army can have considered that they were fighting for their country, or yet for Spain. They were fighting for Russia.”⁸⁹ Despite their noble intentions, the Spaniards fighting for the Republic acted against their country’s best interests; and further propagated the nefarious specter of Communism.

The alleged insidious interests of the press did not end with Spain, however; the Spanish Civil War was but the first step in a larger conspiracy to drive Britain to war with Germany. For Mosley, the primary culprit for appeasement’s obstruction was – once again – the alleged machinations of the Jewish infiltrated press. Indeed, the great majority

⁸⁸ UBSC: G. Sutton, “The Spanish Holocaust,” *Action*, September 4th, 1937.

⁸⁹ UBSC: “Frenchman in Spain,” *Action*, May 8th, 1937.

of Parliament had succumbed, in the eyes of the BUF, to a Jewish conspiracy leading Britain to the precipice of war. This, as to be expected, infuriated the BUF. Chief amongst BUF foreign policy was the adoption of radical, pro-German perspectives; and chief amongst these perspectives was the prevention of another Anglo-German conflict. Accordingly, as the only source of verity, it naturally fell on the BUF to proffer ‘the truth’ as a service to Englishman everywhere.

Consequently, Mosley expounded his truth (rather excessively) to better inform Britain of Germany’s munificence, and also to combat the supposed factual strangulation of the press. Yet, in reality, BUF proffering of the truth typically involved the exaltation of anything German. Even on well-defined themes, such as Nazi anti-Semitism, the BUF (in this case, under the guise of an anonymous correspondent) adopted radical and supportive pro-German sentiments:

The average man, doped by the national Press, has an idea that the only Jews left in Germany are a handful in various prisons and concentration camps. He is led to think that a harmless minority have been subjected to a savage and unjustified persecution for the sole reason that they were Jews. It is never revealed by our Jew-ridden Press that before the Nazi victory in Germany the Jewish minority controlled the government, finance, press, the legal and medical professions, theatres and cinemas, and was trying to rot the very soul of the German people for its own ends. The government’s aim is simple and logical, namely, to isolate Jewish culture from German culture. This policy gives the Jew freedom to enjoy his own culture and to indulge in his own cultural activities, in place of superimposing them on the German people, whether they wanted them or not, which was the state of affairs before Hitler’s rise to power.⁹⁰

This blatant rationalization of German anti-Semitism, though extremist in its ideology, proved anything but the norm. The BUF consistently advocated a controversial, pro-German foreign policy. In the wake of the 1936 Olympic Games (held in Berlin), the BUF took great pains to exalt the illustrious and magnanimous hosts, while also

⁹⁰ UBSC: “Position of Jews in Germany Today,” *Action*, August 14th, 1937.

indulging German anti-Semitism: “Quite contrary to popular opinions expressed in certain British papers, the results fully confirm German racial theories. The Germans have never suggested that Nordics are in all particulars the physical superiors of other races; they merely draw attention to fundamental racial differences which democracy endeavors to ignore.”⁹¹ Though a large majority, BUF fawning over Germany did not exclusively concern anti-Semitism. R. Gordon Canning, in describing post-World War I international politics, lambasted the implementation of the Versailles Treaty, going so far as to contend that “the people of the British Empire must demand an immediate release; they must demand an immediate conference on Herr Hitler’s proposals; they must demand an immediate recognition of German sovereignty in German territory and an equality of status not only in word but in fact.”⁹² In an article written only months later, Mosley echoed a similar, if not more damning, sentiment: “There is no economic argument which can be produced to support the retention, either by Great Britain or by France, of the old German colonies under the hypocritical cover of a mandate. The real reason that Great Britain and France retain these mandated areas is one of inferiority complex.”⁹³ In criticizing the authors of Versailles, deprecating the presence of Judaism, and exalting all things Germany, Mosley – in many respects – essentially reproduced the foreign policy that elevated Hitler to power.

This policy, of German ideological impersonation, essentially baptized Mosley into Nazism, and deputized his movement under Hitler’s control. So much so, that in a 1936 interview with the German Press, Mosley effusively divulged his faith in Hitler’s

⁹¹ UBSC: “The Racial Aspect of the Games,” *Action*, August 13th, 1936.

⁹² UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “The Spirit of Versailles,” *Action*, March 26th 1936.

⁹³ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “From Boycott to Blockade: Goering’s Important Speech,” *Action*, November 7th, 1936.

capacity for peace: “the Leader of the German people has shown to the world his great restraint, his great patience, and his brilliant capacity to secure the rights of Germany at the right time and in the right way.”⁹⁴ Mosley’s intentions, in pursuing this aggrandizing ideological imitation, were simple: a homogenous and fascist Europe; one where Italy and Germany’s ideological tenets framed the entire continents’ jurisdiction: “The solution,” declared Mosley in a 1936 pamphlet, “is the union of the Great Powers of Europe in Universal Fascism.”⁹⁵ The nucleus of this union, according to Mosley, would be “Italy and Germany, [which] now represent an axis around which a new conception for European peace can revolve.”⁹⁶ Incumbent in this continental union would be Mosley, the British Fascist and would-be leader of Fascist Britain.

In proffering this pro-German ideology, Mosley no doubt pacified radical anti-Semitic elements within his party. Yet, simultaneously, Mosley felt the weight of yet another prominent pro-German: his second wife, Diana Mitford. The pair had been secretly married in Joseph Goebbels’ drawing room in 1936 with Hitler as their lone guest. Their wedding gift from Hitler was a small framed portrait of himself, which Diana kept until her internment. Diana, however, had a much deeper connection to Nazism than her husband. She, along with her sister Unity, attended the first Nuremburg Rally in 1933 after the Nazi rise to power.⁹⁷ According to British Security Services, as early as 1934 Diana had emerged as “the principle channel of communication between Mosley and Hitler,” with Mosley “himself admitting that she had frequent interviews with the

⁹⁴ Oswald Mosley, “Hitler’s Speech,” *Action*, October 24th 1936.

⁹⁵ Oswald Mosley, *100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London: BUF Publications, 1936), 35.

⁹⁶ R. Gordon Canning, “Germany and Italy,” *Action*, November 7th, 1936.

⁹⁷ Unity would eventually stay in Berlin as a personal friend and staunch supporter of Hitler. At the outbreak of war, she attempted to commit suicide, and later died of brain damage.

Fuehrer.”⁹⁸ In 1937, during the construction of a British wireless station in Germany, Diana “acted as a go-between in business negotiations between Mosley and the Germany Government.”⁹⁹ The British Government, in monitoring this situation, carefully noted Diana Mosley’s shifting loyalty: “part of the profits of this wireless station, of which the German Government were to bear the entire cost, were to go to Mosley – a veiled form of subvention.”¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the ultimate indication of Diana Mosley’s pro-German proclivities emerged after the declaration of war.¹⁰¹ With her husband in detention, Diana Mosley remained “in touch with the remnants of the British Union and has discussed with the members, who have remained at liberty, the carrying on of the organization. Lady Mosley is acting as a liaison between British Union leaders in prison and the movement outside.”¹⁰² Even with the looming threat of imprisonment for suspected treason, Diana Mosley aided in the continuation of the BUF. Her loyalty to the movement, to her husband, and to Hitler, could not be dissuaded.

Throughout 1937, with an increasingly radical movement and staunchly pro-German wife behind him, Mosley vigorously encouraged the British Government to inculcate some level of accordance with Germany. As continental powers, accordance between the two countries would guarantee long-term peace. Working in Mosley’s favor, politicians in the vein of Neville Chamberlain had – as early as 1937 – introduced the

⁹⁸ NA: KV 2-884/67/12, “Records of Sir Oswald Mosley and Diana Mosley,” June 26th, 1940, *Records of the Security Service*.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ It is rumored that as early as August 1939 (one month before Germany invaded Poland), Hitler had warned Diana war was inevitable.

¹⁰² Ibid.

formal policy of appeasement: a program predicated on the conciliation of minor demands as a means to delay confrontation while sufficient British rearmament could be achieved. In an October 1937 letter, Chamberlain explicated the excitement permeating appeasement's potential for peace: "Hilda [Neville Chamberlain's sister] will have told you of the far reaching plans which I have in mind for the appeasement of Europe and Asia and for the ultimate check to the mad armament race, which if allowed to continue must involve us all in ruin."¹⁰³ Yet, despite Chamberlain's best efforts, Mosley felt appeasement throughout 1937 was consistently stunted by the machinations of the press-ruled Parliament. After witnessing this alleged deceitfulness – a treachery Mosley so vigorously sought to expose – Hubert Sydney and the BUF unilaterally lambasted the supposed underling of Judaism, Parliament, for its refusal to pursue peace: "Under the very noses of Baldwin and the democratically elected gentlemen of Westminster, this twisting and distortion of fact was allowed to continue. While they flattered their constituents with fulsome praise about 'British political honest and free institutions,' they permitted – perhaps even abetted – a ruling clique of utterly unscrupulous aliens to inculcate a war psychology in peace loving Britain. And, let it not be forgotten, *they knew the truth.*"¹⁰⁴ The truth, according to the Sydney, was the industrialized, modern, and ultimately utopian civilization Nazi Germany had constructed. International finance, eliminated from this civic paradigm, now sought to indoctrinate and propagandize Britain into fighting against it.

¹⁰³ NA: CAB 140/149/34, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, October 30th, 1937. *Records of the Cabinet Office.*

¹⁰⁴ UBSC: Hubert Sydney, "Why: Hubert Sydney comments on the storm raised by Lloyd George's comments on his Visit to Germany," *Action*, October 1st, 1936.

Yet, for Mosley, war was not incumbent within the Anglo-German paradigm. As a result, he desperately sought to escort Parliament away from the machinations of international finance. “The will of Hitler and of a Germany reborn,” he argued, “has regained Germany’s place among the nations. Having regained that place she offers the nations Peace in concrete terms, together with a limitation of Armaments. If this new basis of friendship is accepted Peace can be built for the first time on a sure foundation.”

¹⁰⁵ Peace with Germany, according to Mosley, superseded all other foreign policy concerns. The insidious, Jew-ridden press sought to drive Britain to war; the only means to squash this campaign lied in an outright alliance with Germany. Should the Government fail to accomplish this, if “Great Britain is commanded by the panic of France, and still more by the corrupt interest within this country who seek war with Germany, a greater catastrophe than mankind has yet known may well confront us.”¹⁰⁶

Neville Chamberlain and Samuel Hoare, two of the so-called arch-appeasers, shared a similar disposition of placation towards Germany. In a letter to Neville Chamberlain prior to his ascendancy to Prime Minister, Hoare implored Chamberlain to “not let anything irrevocable or badly compromising happen in foreign politics until you are in control. I say this because I am convinced that the F.O. [Foreign Office] is so much biased against Germany (and Italy and Japan) that unconsciously and almost continuously they are making impossible any European reconciliation.”¹⁰⁷ Yet notwithstanding Hoare’s pleas, the Government, despite agreeing that “we cannot not contemplate war,” refused to

¹⁰⁵ UBSC: Oswald Mosley, “Peace with Germany; The Way Out for Europe,” *Action*, March 12th, 1936.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ NA: CAB 140/149/8, Samuel Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, March 17th, 1937. *Records of the Cabinet Office.*

prioritize Anglo-German over all other foreign matters.¹⁰⁸ As a result, Mosley continued to decry the British Government on the grounds of its alleged repudiation of an extremist appeasement campaign.

For Mosley, perhaps the only opponent more frustrating than the communist press was the political machine dictating foreign policy. Communism was amoral, but passing legislation benefiting it was heretical. As a result, Mosley throughout 1937 vilified the spineless Non-Intervention Agreement along with its principle British architect: Anthony Eden. Mosley's odium stemmed from two sources. First and foremost, Mosley contended the non-intervention Agreement acted as an unnecessary drain on Britain's economic resources. Participating governments were required to contribute money to support, however ineffective, the implementation of the plan. Yet, for Mosley, this was money that should have been allocated to more appropriate, or domestic, channels: "the extra cost to the taxpayer for the patrols in the Mediterranean is to be 14,000 pounds a day, which is roughly 100,000 a week or 5,000,000 a year. This sum is to make the Mediterranean safe for foreign ships flying the British flag who are taking oil and other war like stores to Red Spain."¹⁰⁹ The second contention stemmed from non-British vessels illegally flying the British Flag as a means to secure safe passage. "Once again," wrote R. Gordon Canning, "*Action* must protest against this misuse of the British flag under which it seems that every foreigner, whatever his credentials, may shelter and cry for the protection of the British Navy."¹¹⁰ In many instances, the illegal use of Britain's flag would be grounds for considerable intervention. Mosley, however, considered any

¹⁰⁸ NA: CAB 140/149/25, Neville Chamberlain to Samuel Hoare, March 11th, 1936. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹⁰⁹ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, "Behind the News," *Action*, August 14th, 1937.

¹¹⁰ UBSC: R Gordon Canning, "Non-Intervention," *Action*, September 11th, 1937.

quarrel stemming from this controversy outside the realm of Britain's interests. As a result, he – for yet another reason – advocated dismembering the Non-Intervention Committee.

Appointed Foreign Secretary in 1935, Anthony Eden guided non-intervention in Britain and, at least for the BUF, embodied its inexcusable principles. Eden unilaterally supported non-intervention, as well as Britain's existing alliance with France. Mosley and the BUF simply could not fathom this coalition. They believed the existing Franco-Soviet alliance, under the control of international finance, sought to entangle Britain in war against Germany. As a result, the BUF took every opportunity available to eviscerate Eden's political standing: "The Non-Intervention Committee is ceasing to be a cause for mirth," wrote Mosley, "of course it cannot be denied that Eden's antics have provided many a good laugh. Yet surely no ridiculous posturing of this dancing daffodil is worth the British taxpayers' money, particularly when one realizes that the rest of the world is enjoying the laugh without helping to foot the bill"¹¹¹ According to the BUF, Non-Intervention was part of international finance's entanglement-scheme designed to stumble Britain into war against Germany. Non-Intervention, as the argument went, would generate "reports issued by the French 'Front Populaire' Government in Paris with the objective of driving Mr. Baldwin's Government into closer cooperation with it, from fear of danger to British Communications in the Western Mediterranean."¹¹² Chamberlain, though not necessarily consenting to Mosley's vitriol, nonetheless expressed a similar hesitancy over the Anglo-French alliance. In a letter to Hoare,

¹¹¹ UBSC: Oswald Mosley, "Behind the News," *Action*, August 14th, 1937.

¹¹² UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, "Soviet Propaganda Against Franco and Germany," *Action*, January 16th, 1937.

Chamberlain questioned the Foreign Offices' dependence on such a coalition: "You will only get Germany to play on a basis of full equality. The recent Foreign Office papers invariably try to undermine this conception by falling back on the idea of Anglo-French agreements."¹¹³ Yet, despite his hesitancy, Chamberlain ultimately acquiesced to Eden's insistency on the French coalition.

As leader and biggest proponent of the Anglo-French coalition – as well as non-intervention – Eden suffered weekly diatribes annihilating his program. "Mr. Eden's work," wrote R. Gordon Canning in one particularly scathing article, "is insufficient as in indictment of one of the most spectacular failures in the history of the British Foreign Office...this posturing charlatan of peace and humanity – this adopted political son of honest Baldwin, this vain and bombastic "intellectual" is so sleek and self-satisfied that not one hair of his well oiled head is displaced by the tempests which he has stirred up in Europe."¹¹⁴ BUF nuisance eventually peaked when, in July of 1937, a faction within the Republican Government petitioned Britain to mediate a peace agreement. When Eden declined, the BUF lambasted his purposeful decision to avoid peace: "the gentlemen responsible for this effort appealed to Britain to bring pressure to bear for the establishment of peace in the Peninsula, but this, it seemed, had to be carried out only through the saintly aura of Mr. Anthony Eden. At any rate, he greatly deprecated any suggestions that force should be used, thereby alienating the sympathy of almost the entire audience and stirring up animosity in the other peace-loving gentlemen on the

¹¹³ NA: CAB 140/149/25, Neville Chamberlain to Samuel Hoare, March 17th, 1937. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹¹⁴ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, "Eden's Shamefull Record," *Action*, February 27th, 1937.

platform”¹¹⁵ Ultimately, Eden embodied the ideological reverse of BUF foreign policy: a pro-democratic, anti-fascist politician.

Eden’s anti-totalitarianism, at its core, naturally led to an inherent bias towards Franco, Hitler and Mussolini, something the BUF – and even Chamberlain – expressed frustration over. Indeed, in instilling the tenets of appeasement, Chamberlain – elected Prime Minister in May of 1937 – encountered obstruction from the Eden mentality. “Unless the Foreign Office are constantly reminded,” Chamberlain wrote in a letter to Halifax, “that this is our attitude they are tempted to follow the old Eden lines and chortle at the prospect of ‘defeating Fascist aims.’ I simply cannot keep their minds fixed on our real purpose; the dislike they have of the totalitarian states is so strong that it will keep bursting out.”¹¹⁶ Chamberlain, on many levels, articulated a similar frustration to that of Mosley’s. The BUF, however, enunciated this nuisance with considerably more vitriol. Indeed, throughout Eden’s tenure as Foreign Secretary, the BUF consciously attacked his every move. He was, in the eyes of many Fascists, the ultimate underling from which international finance would drive Britain to war.

BUF criticism did not, however, stop with Anthony Eden. Indeed, in many instances Mosley and the BUF perceived the government’s relative inaction as de facto espousal of the alleged Jew-driven campaign for war. Accordingly, the BUF harshly criticized many leading members of the Government. In one particularly passionate oration, Mosley condemned the complacency of Parliament as treason: “They are condemned out of their own mouths for a crime for which many statesmen would have

¹¹⁵ UBSC: Reveille, “The World, The Flesh – and Financial Democracy,” *Action*, July 3rd, 1937.

¹¹⁶ NA: CAB 140/149/26, Neville Chamberlain to Samuel Hoare, April 9th, 1937. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

been impeached in a more virile age and for which they will be impeached when Fascism comes into power.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, the great majority of BUF frustration, though directed at Anthony Eden and Stanley Baldwin, Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, respectively, nonetheless applied to Parliament as a whole. Calling their actions aggressive, belligerent, and unconscionable, the BUF contended that these men had succumbed to the war-driven machinations of international finance: “Never in the history of the British race have our kindly, easy-going, and peace-loving people been so assiduously ‘conditioned’ for war as at the present time. Preliminary hostilities opened with Stanley Baldwin’s declaration that Britain’s frontiers were on the Rhine. Uttered in time of peace, that homicidal statement could have only one meaning – Britain’s manhood must get ready to fight in a quarrel which was not their concern, against a foe whom by every natural instinct they should treasure as their friend.”¹¹⁸ The complacency of Parliament, combined with the aggression of Baldwin, Eden, and the like, created in the eyes of Mosley a cocktail of belligerency.

The solution, according to Mosley, lied in the BUF’s “Britain for the British,” or sphere of influence, program. Under the parameters of this program, Germany and Britain would form an alliance, with Britain free to dominate affairs outside Europe while Germany essentially dominated everything within it. “This policy alone is capable of bringing peace to a distracted world and unity to the Empire,” argued R. Gordon Canning, “the regenerated Germany must be accepted as one of the Great Powers liberated from the chains of the Versailles Treaty, and restored to the community of

¹¹⁷ NA: KV 4-140/39/5, Home Office, “Oswald Mosley” February, 19th, 1937. *Records of the Security Service*.

¹¹⁸ UBSC: A.K. Chesterton, “They Intend a War Against Germany,” *Action*, March 27th, 1937.

nations as an equal and not as a criminal under remand. With this outlook, the British Union has advocated the return of certain mandated areas to German possession, a return supported on legal, economic and moral grounds.”¹¹⁹ As an economic, social, and ideological paragon, Germany represented the genesis of fascism. An alliance between Fascist Britain and Nazi Germany, in the eyes of Mosley, represented the most secure means to avoid war. “The solution for the world’s evil,” he argued, “is before our eyes; those nations who would survive will have to accept some form of National Socialism. An Anglo-German collaboration would keep the peace of Europe and an Anglo-Italian collaboration would keep the peace of the Mediterranean.”¹²⁰

Despite their most passionate efforts, the BUF incited little change in the ranks of Parliament. And yet, despite swirling conspiratorial machinations, the Nationalist cause marched forward to victory. By 1938, Franco had conquered the majority of Republican territory, and during that year conducted preparations for the final assault against Madrid. Yet despite the seemingly inevitable Nationalist victory – a moment for all Fascist movements to celebrate – the BUF largely ceased its coverage of Spanish affairs. Rare was the anti-Republican article appearing in *Action*, or the blackshirt oration devoted to Franco. Even the fall of Madrid, and the induction of Spain within the Fascist European community, received tepid coverage. In *Action*, the proclamation constituted no more than one eighth of page seven, and read: “Madrid has fallen; and the details of its surrender reveal that, to the mass of the population, Franco has come not as a conqueror but a deliver. With the flight from the city of Miaja and Casado, it became impossible to

¹¹⁹ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “Our Foreign Policy in Review,” *Action*, October 2nd, 1937.

¹²⁰ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, “Wire-Walking World,” *Action*, July 31st, 1937.

resist the people's demand for an end to the fratricidal struggle."¹²¹ This lackluster coverage, in many respects, contradicted the statement made by a BUF member at the outset of hostilities: "the battle which is being fought in Spain is that it is part of a war in which the life of Europe and the future of civilization are at stake." In actuality, however, by 1938 the majority of the BUF's roughly 12,000 members (of which 2,000 were active) would still have maintained the veracity of that statement. Spain, as the foreign correspondent had explicated, constituted but one part of the war from which civilization was at stake.¹²² In 1938 a much larger component of that war emerged. Accordingly, Mosley once again shifted the focus of his foreign policy, this time away from Spain and towards a much more significant factor: a seemingly inevitable war with Germany.

¹²¹ UBSC: "Madrid Falls!" *Action*, April 1st, 1939.

¹²² Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt* (London: Penguin, 2006), 223.

III. IF AT FIRST YOU CAN'T CONCEDE, FLY, FLY, FLY AGAIN: MOSLEY, CHAMBERLAIN, AND THE MUNICH AGREEMENT

In 1936, Hitler deliberately violated the Versailles Treaty through the remilitarization of the Rhineland, a fertile economic region crucial to German expansion. Reaction from Britain was tepid. Similarly, in 1938 Hitler embarked on a campaign pressuring Austria to consent to *Anschluss*, or reunification. Though Austria beseeched Britain for assistance, the government offered little more than a written protestation once the forced amalgamation had occurred. In April 1938, with Hitler's sights set upon the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, the British Government resolved to intervene.¹²³

The BUF, in response, initiated a corresponding intensification of pro-German propaganda. The lingering ineffectiveness of this campaign, however, combined with the growing inevitability of war inculcated a sense of fatalism within BUF ranks. Indeed, by September 1938 the BUF unilaterally braced for a seemingly ordained conflict with its ideological counterpart. Yet, within the government the BUF so often criticized, the impetus of appeasement – under the direction of Neville Chamberlain – sparked a measure of hope for British Fascism. In September, with the government attempting the placation of Germany, the BUF celebrated Chamberlain as part of a 'precious few' struggling to secure peace for Britain. One month later, at the announcement of the Munich agreement – the apex of appeasement's reign over British foreign policy – the BUF commemorated not only the procurement of peace, but the de facto implementation

¹²³ Peter Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon & London, 2007), 79-215.

of Mosley's foreign program. Indeed, appeasement constituted the initial stage in Mosley's foreign policy. Its successful implementation by the British Government, in many respects, aligned both Mosley and Chamberlain's foreign policies on the same ideological plane. So much so, that Mosley claimed to have profoundly influenced Chamberlain's writing of the Munich Agreement.

Bracketing this complicated, yet synergistic, accord was BUF assessment of British foreign policy before and after Munich. On many levels, the full-scale implementation of appeasement compelled the BUF to reevaluate its often rancorous condemnation of government. Along these same lines, the eventual failure of Chamberlain's policy likewise induced a resuscitation of pre-appeasement (government-directed) vitriol. As a result, the bearing of BUF foreign policy underwent two dramatic shifts. The first occurred in 1938, as Neville Chamberlain directed British foreign policy away from the Eden paradigm, and implemented the full scope of his appeasement ideology. The BUF, in response, ceased the anti-governmental propaganda campaign that characterized 1936-7, and celebrated the Chamberlain led Government – callous denigration of Parliamentary belligerency notwithstanding – for its heroic engagement of peace. This accord, however, proved fleeting. The dramatic breakdown of appeasement in March 1939 resuscitated the fatalism that characterized the BUF's pre-appeasement outlook. Consequently, a second shift in BUF foreign policy occurred. Mosley and his movement, essentially resigned to their fate, revived the government-directed vitriol of the pre-appeasement era, and chastised their erstwhile champion: Chamberlain. On the eve of war, Mosley once again positioned his movement as the

harbinger of peace. Yet only months after hostilities commenced, senior BUF members were interned, and the BUF as a coherent, organized party ceased to exist.

During the first few months of 1938, with both England and Germany seemingly poised for conflict, the BUF intensified its scapegoating of a potential war to increasingly amorphous and conspiratorial entities. Foremost in this plot remained the British press, still under the apocryphal direction of Jewish-led international finance: “The British people are faced with a formidable and persistent conspiracy,” argued Mosley, “While the will of our people had so far prevented war the activities of certain great vested interests and their political servants had so far prevented the establishment of a stable peace. Whenever a move was made towards appeasement these interests were so far strong enough to call a halt, and to frustrate the desire of the people for peace.”¹²⁴ Despite this damning assessment, Mosley and the BUF nonetheless maintained a modicum of hope. According to Mosley, the government, effortlessly manipulated and unilaterally inept, still during 1938 possessed the means to avert the impending catastrophe: “The old parties in Parliament have pursued a different policy in deference to the interests which they serve. Now they tell the people they cannot be rescued from the consequences of that policy without loss of national honour. They lie. Even now, even this Government can extricate itself from this situation, even without loss of national prestige.”¹²⁵ Chamberlain, from his post as Prime Minister, ostensibly agreed with Mosley. In a speech delivered after the resignation of Anthony Eden, Chamberlain notified both Parliament and the general public that placation would deliver peace to Europe: “The

¹²⁴ KV 4-140/26/9, Home Office, “Oswald Mosley at Cheam” August 12th, 1938. *Records of the Security Service*, National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

¹²⁵ Sir Oswald Mosley, “How to Get Peace: Plan That Could Now Secure It,” *Action*, October 1st, 1938, University of Birmingham Special Collections (hereafter UBSC), Birmingham.

question is whether we are to enter upon negotiations or refuse even to contemplate them, and if there be any here who really wish to obtain peace, do they think they can ever obtain peace by continuing a vendetta and refusing even to talk about their differences? What we are seeking to do is to get a general appeasement throughout Europe which will give us peace.”¹²⁶ Yet, despite his earnest claim, Chamberlain found stringent opposition to appeasement. His best efforts, it seemed, could not quell the growing fatalism surrounding Anglo-German tensions.

The solution to this tension, according to Mosley, was the unreserved implementation of the BUF’s sphere of influence program. With Europe left for Germany, Britain would be unencumbered of disastrous and scheming international alliances. A salient international strategy, according to Mosley, considering the transparent reality that “not one Briton in a thousand is willing to fight about Austria. Nor are the British people willing to fight for Czechoslovakia. The sooner press and politicians learn this the better for world peace and British honour...It has been made an issue of British politics by the same corrupt forces that have tried to provoke war with Italy for the sake of slave owners in Abyssinia...Finance wants war because Finance sees its world game beaten. When Finance is beaten in Britain world peace is Safe. The British Union alone can beat Finance.”¹²⁷ For Mosley, losing British lives in a decidedly non-British conflict constituted treason. As a result, he actively campaigned against any involvement in European affairs.

¹²⁶ NA: CAB 127/158/16, Neville Chamberlain, “February 21st Speech at House of Commons,” February 21st, 1938. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹²⁷ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Britons Fight for Britons Only,” *Action*, March 19th, 1938.

Luckily, according to Mosley, the government was not devoid of altogether capable politicians. These men, as the last bastion of British civic responsibility, protected teetering international tensions from falling into war: “Some of them – Chamberlain, Hoare, Halifax, to name the three most prominent – are possessed of certain qualities which distinguish the senescent British ruling class at its best. They display a certain anxiety to understand and to live at peace with peoples whose ideas may be different from their own. They have a certain sense of responsibility and a certain balance in the conduct of foreign affairs.” For Mosley and the BUF, “Britain for the British” took an obstinate precedence over all other matters. These politicians, through one medium or another, all supported the first phase in this ideology: appeasement. It should come as no surprise, then, that *Action* lauded this inchoate shift towards Mosley’s foreign policy: “Above all, they [Chamberlain, Hoare, and Halifax] show some signs of placing security and well-being of this country above those of certain international groups and interests which are determined to use the British as their Janissaries in a war of revenge against National Socialist Germany.”¹²⁸

Further buoying BUF optimism of these determined few was the February 20th dismissal of Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Mosley and his cohort condemned Eden’s European meddling as international instigation, and obsessively called for his resignation. After Eden’s egress, the BUF contended, Chamberlain would be emancipated from Eden’s anti-totalitarianism and, on a fundamental level, be free to cultivate Anglo-German relations. This was a notion Chamberlain himself validated: “A great many people still say they don’t understand why he resigned. For this he himself is responsible

¹²⁸ UBSC: Moonlight, “War-Mongers’ Bid for Power,” *Action*, March 21st, 1938.

for I rather doubt whether till the last moment he realized that the issue between us was not whether we should have conversations now but whether we should have them at all. I have gradually arrived at the conclusion that at bottom Anthony did not want to talk either with Hitler or Mussolini and as I did he was right to go.”¹²⁹ For Mosley, Eden along with a few others, essentially personified Jewish-led, anti-Nazi aggression. Consequently, on several occasions, the BUF was so bold as to proclaim that “Eden will retire from office as the greatest failure in the history of British Foreign Secretaries.” His dismissal, then, when combined with Chamberlain’s ascendancy and the political inertia of appeasement, should have lifted the BUF’s disposition. However, Mosley and the BUF, though encouraged by Chamberlain’s rise and Eden’s fall, on some levels recognized the inherent fatalism of parliamentary appeasement. It could, for all intents and purposes, stop the bleeding, but not heal the wound. So long as democracy remained, appeasement would never mature into its more sophisticated counterpart, ‘Britain for the British,’ essentially leaving the Government mired in the futile malaise of political dithering: “Bold as Chamberlain’s dismissal of Eden may seem, there can be little hope of any real peace policy from the Government, as long as it is bound to ‘Democratic’ procedure, and the preservation of those ‘liberties’ which have been exploited so dangerously in the past.”¹³⁰ According to Mosley, Chamberlain, Samuel Hoare, and Lord Halifax – the “precious few” – consistently found themselves encumbered either by Parliamentary bureaucracy or the subversion of Judaism. Chamberlain, though lacking the fanaticism of Mosley, nonetheless expressed a similar frustration over the

¹²⁹ NA: CAB 140/149/28, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, February 27th, 1938. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹³⁰ UBSC: “Chamberlain in Chains,” *Action*, February 26th, 1938.

bureaucracy stunting the implementation of appeasement. “I am not too happy,” he wrote in a letter to Hoare, “about the F.O. who seem to me to have no imagination and no courage. I must say A.E. [Anthony Eden] is awfully good in accepting any suggestions without grumbling but it is wearing always to have to begin at the beginning again and sometimes even to re-write their dispatches for them.”¹³¹

On several occasions, *Action* portrayed Chamberlain’s efforts for peace as shackled by the strangulation of government and international finance. “For example,” explained one article, “Hitler’s demand for the former German colonies must be met by a readiness to negotiate. But can Chamberlain do anything of the sort, bound as he is by the party machine, the very caucus created by his father?....Even if he could swing the machine by pointing out the danger of war, can he face the power of the Press poisoning the mind of the public day after day against the resurgent nations abroad?”¹³² The BUF, in answering this question, generally preached skepticism over hope. It was as if a certain inevitability disseminated through party ranks; an expectation that Chamberlain would buckle under the substantial pressure of anti-Nazi aggression. As a result, frequent stories questioning Chamberlain’s resolve emerged on the pages of *Action*. “Chamberlain has visited France and returned,” declared one BUF writer, “The British public once more ask in what direction is his foreign policy leading. Has he deserted the policy of appeasement for the policy of the old alliances and the vicious system of the balance of power?”¹³³ On the eve of September, with one of their “precious few” ostensibly

¹³¹ NA: CAB 140/149/28, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, September 12th, 1937. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹³² UBSC: “Chamberlain in Chains.”

¹³³ UBSC: “Is Chamberlain Wobbling?” *Action*, December 3rd, 1938.

‘wobbling,’ the BUF braced for war, hoping the British public would come to the realization they had no stake in a Jewish-led, European war.

Their hopes, on many levels, materialized during the negotiations that led to the Munich Agreement. In September, with Anglo-German relations inching inexorably towards conflict, the issue of Czechoslovakia threatened to accelerate the outbreak of hostilities. Germany demanded the annexation of Germans living in the Sudetenland, and Hitler, on several occasions, publicized his willingness to use any means necessary: “At the beginning of this year,” Hitler proclaimed at a rally, “the twentieth after our collapse – I made a resolution to lead back into the Reich the 10 millions of Germans who were still standing outside it. It was completely clear to me that this return could only be brought about by our own strength.”¹³⁴ Against this backdrop, the BUF braced for war, fully assured of a belligerent response from the allegedly Jewish-driven Parliament. “In order to keep this minority [Germans living in Czechoslovakia] in chains,” wrote Mosley, “the Left Wings of the democracies are quite willing that millions of British lives should be sacrificed, and in so far as the Conservative Party backs French policy Chamberlain inevitably finds himself lined up on the side of the left... Thus it is little use Chamberlain posing as a peacemaker, since his handcuffs bind him on the one hand to France, Russia, and Czechoslovakia, and on the other to the silly jingo greed and anti-German hatred of his own supporters who in point of fact are the dictators of his policy”¹³⁵

To make matters worse, Mosley contended that these conniving bedfellows were preventing ethnic Germans from rejoining their homeland. “There is in Czechoslovakia,”

¹³⁴ NA: FO 40868/28/9, Adolf Hitler, “Translation of Herr Hitler’s Speech on Sunday, October 9, at Saarbrücken,” October 9th, 1938. *Records created and inherited by the Foreign Office.*

¹³⁵ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Chamberlain in Handcuffs: Why He cannot Secure European Peace,” *Action*, March 5th, 1938.

contended Mosley, “a very large and disgracefully ill-treated German minority which looks to the Fatherland sooner or later for release from an intolerable position.”¹³⁶ These Germans, shackled to Czechoslovakia against their will, simply wanted the right of self-determination. The British Government, long champions of this tenet, curiously ignored, according to the BUF, this entitlement. This blatant hypocrisy, asserted the BUF, wholly revealed the belligerent, guiding hand of international finance: “These politicians, who have prated for 20 years of self-determination, now treat the mere suggestion of self-determination as a crime. Yet when 3.5 million Germans want to enter their Fatherland, self-determination is to be dismissed without discussion. In fact, the mask of hypocrisy is dropped at least, and they want to fight for Czechoslovakia as the central European outpost of Jewish Communism and Jewish finance.”¹³⁷ With tensions seemingly boiling over – and the specter of international finance looming over Britain – the threat of war pervaded England’s collective consciousness. At the 11th hour, however, with war seemingly moments away, Neville Chamberlain postponed any such conflict through his celebrated signing of the Munich Agreement. It was a document, according to Mosley, constructed on the foundation of BUF foreign policy.

On the morning of October 1st, as Neville Chamberlain disembarked from his aircraft, an enthusiastic mob of Englishmen besieged Heston Aerodrome. Trying merely to catch a glimpse of their transcendent Prime Minister, the horde celebrated, along with all of Britain, Chamberlain’s dexterous procurement of peace. Later that day, at Buckingham Palace, Chamberlain commemorated his exploits during the now-notorious “Peace For Our Time,” speech. “The settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem,” he

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “For Peace and People,” *Action*, September 17th, 1938.

proclaimed, “which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine.” Interrupted by riotous applause, Chamberlain quieted his admirers, and steadfastly continued: “Some of you, perhaps, have already heard what it contains but I would just like to read it to you: ‘We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.’”¹³⁸ Coincidentally, at that very moment, Mosley conducted his own observance exalting Chamberlain and rejoicing in the maintenance of amity: “Now Chamberlain made a journey to Germany last week, which at the time I said was an act of courage and common sense. Even at the eleventh hour all the parliamentary machinery was thrown aside and Chamberlain had the sense and courage to go to Germany and see Hitler...Peace and hope came back to the hearts of the ordinary people all the world over.”¹³⁹ For Mosley, incumbent within the Munich Agreement was the validation of his ‘Britain for the British’ policy. The Munich Agreement, though precluding hostilities, nonetheless sacrificed Czechoslovakian national pride. This forfeiture – still commonly referred to as the ‘Munich Betrayal’ in Czechoslovakia – appeared to align the government’s foreign policy with that of Mosley’s sphere-of-influence program. For years Mosley had contended that Eastern Europe fell within Germany’s sphere of influence and, consequently, could arbitrate or – in this particular case – dictate territorial concerns. Chamberlain, at the Munich Agreement, unilaterally

¹³⁸ NA: PREM 1-266A/132/ 35, Neville Chamberlain, “Peace For Our Time,” September 30th, 1938. *Records of the Prime Minister’s Office*.

¹³⁹ NA: KV 4-140/24/8, Home Office, “Speech by Sir Oswald Mosley” October 1st, 1938. *Records of the Security Service*.

adopted this tenet. He idly observed as Hitler – not unlike a surgeon – carved out a rich agricultural territory; one, not coincidentally, where the preponderance of Czechoslovakia’s border defense lied, all in the name of Anglo-German peace.

Further aligning Chamberlain’s foreign policy with that of Mosley’s was Britain’s treatment of Czechoslovakia itself. The Czech government was not invited to the conference, precluding their involvement and exacerbating the sobering reality that Germany now dominated the Eastern-European sphere virtually unopposed, a concept Hitler himself acknowledged in a letter written to Chamberlain: “The Government in Prague feels justified in maintenance that the proposals in my memorandum of September 23rd went far beyond the concession which it made to the British and French Governments and that the acceptance of the memorandum would rob Czechoslovakia of every guarantee for its national existence. This statement is based on the argument that Czechoslovakia is to give up a great part of her prepared defensive system before she can take steps elsewhere for her military protection.”¹⁴⁰ Even France, despite possessing a defensive alliance with Czechoslovakia, conceded the region to German control. On many levels, Britain and France essentially abandoned their political ally, leaving Germany to dictate territorial concerns. An implication substantiated when, only months later, Hitler invaded the remaining portion of Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain and Hitler, on a fundamental level, pursued an incarnation of the continental alliance – along with its sphere of influence corollary – Mosley so desperately craved. Consequently, Mosley, a self-proclaimed arbiter of peace, quite willingly claimed a primary measure of credit in the authorship of the Munich Agreement:

¹⁴⁰ NA: PREM 1-266A/12/9, Adolf Hitler, “Translation of Letter from the Chancellor in Reply to the Prime Minister’s letter of September 26th which Herr Hitler would like included in the White Paper.” *Records of the Prime Minister's Office*.

Only Mosley stood like a rock in this lunatic flood, confident in the inherent sanity of the British people, determined never to betray the cause of peace, whatever the consequences. The people rallied to him, and at his great meeting the panic was exposed as a manufactured press hysteria...How sane, how unmoved by the relentless pressure of events he had remained, we may judge by the fact that this Plan, written on Tuesday, and published on Wednesday, had become by Friday the substantial basis of the peace settlement concluded at Munich. Triumphantly has Mosley vindicated his reputation for statesmanship in one of the greatest testing times of history!¹⁴¹

The Munich Agreement, to be sure, shared several predominant tenets of BUF foreign policy. Chamberlain, however, never acknowledged any degree of influence from Mosley's controversial ideology. For his part, Mosley abruptly celebrated his crowning achievement, quick to lambaste the now regrouping anti-German elements within Britain. Indeed, any potential national controversy regarding Mosley's contribution to the Munich Agreement was quickly squelched by the BUF's continuing paranoia over the alleged contagion of international finance.

Indeed, amidst the atmosphere of celebration saturating Britain after Munich, Mosley – as part of the second stage in his foreign policy development – inexplicably resuscitated the fatalism that characterized his pre-appeasement foreign policy. Only one day after Munich, Mosley abruptly halted any discussion of peace for the sober reality still confronting Britain: powerful anti-German elements, though suffering a temporary setback, would nonetheless resume their quest to entangle Britain in a European conflict. “And now what has happened,” asked Mosley one day after the Munich Agreement, “Something has got busy. What is it? Why is it the cloud of war is hovering over us again? Why are we again threatened with war? Why is it the whole of the British Press are talking war again? Why is it the Labour Party are screaming for war? Why is it that

¹⁴¹ UBSC: British Union's Lone Fight,” *Action*, October 8th, 1936.

pressure is brought against the Government in favour of war?”¹⁴² The answer, according to Mosley, was the ubiquitous coalition of international finance. Spinning the press, manipulating the public, and influencing the government, this insidious alien element sought revenge against Germany. “There are three reasons why Germany today is taking very severe action against the Jewish minority in their country, and all three reasons turned around the belief expressed, both by Germans and by many in this country, that international Jewry is doing everything it its power to crush the new Germany.”¹⁴³ Complicit with this nefarious cabal was the government; a collection of which the majority – outside of Mosley’s “precious few” – were inept, mistake-prone pawns. Their sheer numbers, however, combined with the inherent limitations of democracy to grant them dominance over government affairs. Consequently, even as the country basked in the glow of Munich, Mosley campaigned against the seemingly ordained war ahead. Much like after Eden’s dismissal, though significantly more intense, the BUF essentially recognized the limitations of appeasement. The valiant efforts of Chamberlain and the like, though striving for peace, could only postpone war.

Yet, rather than promote peace, the BUF fought against a war that had yet to transpire. Mosley engineered a propaganda campaign calculated to inculcate an abhorrence of war; to perceive it as the final recourse, and not resolution, to Anglo-German tension. Foremost in this campaign was the necessity for Britain to adopt a defensive position, to engage in conflict only if provoked. This tenet, part of Mosley’s larger foreign policy, dovetailed with Mosley’s ‘Britain for the British’ campaign, and

¹⁴² NA: KV 4-140/16/28, Home Office, “Speech by Sir Oswald Mosley” October 1st, 1938. *Records of the Security Service*, KV 4-140.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

sought to prevent war at the expense of another country: “Defense in our minds is associated with an attack upon Britain or the Empire. And were such an attack threatened there would be no doubt about our response. But there is no such threat. Whether or not one can accept the declarations of Herr Hitler, the Siegfried Line and the Naval Pact are clear evidence that he has no intention of striking west.”¹⁴⁴ Much like Mosley’s pre-appeasement declarations, incumbent within this campaign were the decidedly non-British elements dragging Britain to war. “World supplies,” wrote A.K. Chesterton, “are in the grip of the world parasites. The people look to their political representatives for help in their dire need. The Political ‘Left’ responds by telling them horrific stories about the needs of Abyssinians, Czechs, Spaniards, Chinamen, asks them to give generously to every foreign cause, and utterly neglects its championship of their own cause which is politely supposed to be its job.”¹⁴⁵ As a result of these unnecessary entanglements, British foreign policy was no longer British, but instead in the hands of deceitful aliens. Indeed, as Britain marched toward war Mosley intensified the alien conspiracy guiding it, contending the government cared little, if at all, for British interests: “For the first time in British history, the conduct of British foreign policy was taken out of British hands. British opinion and British judgment counted no longer. Our control over our own destinies was entirely surrendered. Any frontier incident, which turned the light heads of the Poles, could set Europe alight if the Poles considered their independence menaced. So it became a literal fact that the lives of a million Britons were placed ‘in the pocket of any drunken Polish corporal.’”¹⁴⁶ Standing at the precipice of war, the BUF sought

¹⁴⁴ UBSC: “What do We Defend? No British Interests are Threatened,” *Action*, April 1st, 1939.

¹⁴⁵ UBSC: A.K. Chesterton, “To Hell With The Government Liars,” *Action*, January 14th, 1939.

¹⁴⁶ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Blank Cheques for Baltic Crooks,” *Action*, August 19th, 1939.

desperately for an alternative. Unlike 1938, however, the actions of Mosley's "precious few" did little to engender confidence in the direction of British interests.

Whereas throughout 1938 British Fascism felt reenergized by Mosley's "precious few," the austere political climate of post-Munich Europe only exacerbated the BUF's fatalistic disposition. The reality of Hitler's continued aggression, the ostensible need for British intervention, and, perhaps most importantly, the breakdown of appeasement, created for the government an impetus to adjust its foreign policy. However, rather than accelerate appeasement into Mosley's 'Britain for the British' campaign, Chamberlain, pragmatically yielded to his Parliamentary cohorts and adopted a more aggressive program. The impetus for Chamberlain's shift, on several levels, was the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Though swift in both attack and eventual victory, the symbolic consequences of Germany's invasion proved utterly catastrophic. Hitler, with his actions, fully exhibited the insignificance he awarded to the Munich conference; a particularly damning development when perceived through the lens of Anglo-German amity. Indeed, Czechoslovakia – and to a lesser extent Britain – had placed their collective security on the assurances of Chamberlain and Hitler. In a letter written to Samuel Hoare, Jan Masaryk, a Czechslovakian Minister, underscored the unique dependence Chamberlain had created – in the wake of the Munich Agreement – for Czechoslovakia: "We accepted this plan [Munich] under extreme duress. We had not even time to make any representations about its many unworkable features. Nevertheless, we accepted it because we understood that it was the end of the demands to be made upon us, and because it followed from the Anglo-French pressure that these two Powers would accept responsibility for our reduced frontiers and would guarantee us their

support in the event of our being feloniously attacked.”¹⁴⁷ Yet, despite assurances from both Hitler and Chamberlain, Czechoslovakia was overrun in a matter of months.

In the wake of this invasion, the growing conviction that Hitler’s ultimate goal lied not in Eastern, but Western, Europe gained significant traction. As early as 1938, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan – a devout Chamberlainite – had written “I have the profoundest suspicions of Hitler’s intensions...I believe that what he would like best, if he could do it, would be to smash the British Empire.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, despite this forewarning – from an ardent supporter, no less – Chamberlain carried on, writing to Hoare as late as February 1939 that “for the present it still looks as though we are in for a period of gradually increasing peacefulness. My information all goes to show that the Germans are in no mood for war and that Hitler is preoccupied with his economic difficulties.”¹⁴⁹ This stubborn misunderstanding of Hitler’s intentions, on many levels, crippled Chamberlain’s post-Czechoslovakia political efforts. The public, and even Chamberlain’s own Conservative Party, had expressed a measure of frustration in the months following the Munich Agreement. The Czechoslovakian invasion, occurring less than a year later, crystallized the sentiments of humiliation and anger swirling through Britain’s collective consciousness. Even Halifax – and to a lesser degree Secretary of State for War Leslie Hore-Belisha – two of

¹⁴⁷ NA: PREM 1-266A/21/14, Jan Masaryk, “Letter Handed by the Czechoslovak Minister to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,” September 25th, 1938. *Records of the Prime Minister's Office*.

¹⁴⁸ NA: FO 371/23112/31, Sir Alexander Cadogan to Viscount Halifax, February 17th, 1938. *Records of the Foreign Office*.

¹⁴⁹ NA: CAB 140/149/16, Neville Chamberlain to Samuel Hoare, February 26th, 1939. Records of the Cabinet Office.

Chamberlain's most loyal supporters, began to reconsider the Prime Minister's insistency on appeasement.¹⁵⁰

Ultimately, in the wake of the Czechoslovakian invasion, appeasement, the primary weapon of Chamberlain's foreign policy, entirely collapsed. In the weeks that followed, Chamberlain had little choice but to abandon his pragmatic but ultimately flawed strategy. Accordingly, and with political support withering around him, Chamberlain instituted a more exacting foreign policy. "The only line of advance," he wrote after the invasion, "that presented itself to me after the Czecho-Slovakian affair was to get a declaration signed by the four powers Britain, France, Russia, and Poland that they would act together in the event of further signs of German aggressive ambitions."¹⁵¹ Doing just that, Chamberlain extended a coordinated Anglo-French guarantee to Poland on March 31st (similar guarantees were extended to Greece and Romania on April 13th), and announced significant rearmament proposals.

Mosley and the BUF, quite expectedly, were devastated by this shift. In response, *Action* featured several articles lambasting the inefficacy of parliamentary decisions, particularly the alliance with France: "Then came the blunders. The first, the most stupid and the most continuous, was the complete line-up with France on every issue. Against advice, national characteristics, and our own best interests the Government then in the hands of Lloyd George supported the iniquitous Treat of Versailles! The end of the last war – the seed of the next..." Chamberlain's move towards belligerency, on many levels, all but assured that conflict would arise. As the last bulwark of peace in a continent

¹⁵⁰ Peter Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon & London, 2007), 89-174.

¹⁵¹ NA: CAB 140/149/22, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, March 26th, 1939. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

preparing for war, Chamberlain remained the BUF's only hope for a cessation – or even postponement – of hostilities. His defection removed the only hope Mosley held in Parliament. The BUF, in response, unilaterally condemned their erstwhile champion:

Let us just examine what has happened since Munich. On Friday, September 29th, Mr. Neville Chamberlain arrived at Heston Aerodrome. He stepped from his plane waving a piece of paper. It was a document on which was written the signature of Herr Hitler and Mr. Chamberlain pledging themselves not to go to war. The British Nation, which had lived through a week of high tension, let itself go in an outburst of spontaneous hero worship. Mr. Chamberlain had prevented a war. In Britain, and from France, there was complete silence from the opposition which had been shrieking for war....In his first big speech in Parliament he announced that, having made peace secure in Europe, we must now spend untold millions in rearmament. In that speech he destroyed all hope of peace and he destroyed all hope in himself as the savior of peace...Mr. Churchill, Mr. Eden, Mr. Duff Cooper and the Labour leaders all said Herr Hitler wanted to make war on Britain. But common sense tells you and I that if an enemy wants to attack us he would do it when we were weak.¹⁵²

Within these blanketed deprecations, the majority of BUF odium quite naturally fell on those politicians urging an anti-German, pro-war ideology. From its inception, the BUF felt this dominant subsection of Parliament – controlled by international finance – sought to annihilate British Fascism, drag Britain to war, and impede appeasement (or any other incarnation of peace) by any means. As the embodiment of this pro-war, anti-appeasement ideology, Winston Churchill cultivated, in the eyes of the BUF, a deep connection with Jewish subterfuge: “How is it that Churchill is able thus to frustrate the policy of appeasement, which should have followed up the Anglo-Italian Pace with similar negotiations with Germany? We must never forget that Churchill has made himself the spokesman of Jewry in their quarrel with Germany.”¹⁵³ In the months after

¹⁵² UBSC: John Emery, “British Warmongers: They Talk Peace and Prepare War,” *Action*, April 1st, 1939.

¹⁵³ UBSC: “Jewish Trojan Horse,” *Action*, May 21st, 1938.

Munich, despite allegedly influencing what was up until that point the greatest foreign policy achievement in British history, Mosley and the BUF once again braced for war.

The source of this fatalism was the British Government's Eastern European guarantees. Though employed primarily as a deterrence, these guarantees nonetheless demonstrated a political and ideological reversal in British Foreign Policy. Britain had not only extended its collective security to Eastern Europe – the antithesis of Mosley's Britain for the British campaign – but also essentially left the decision for war in Hitler's unpredictable hands. Chamberlain had, for all intents and purposes, acknowledged the seeming inevitability of war. He, unlike Mosley, however, fully grasped the nature of German belligerence. Accordingly, for Chamberlain, crucial to securing a powerful 'peace front' was the inclusion of the Soviet Union. Britain's guarantee to Poland, however, all but precluded an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Bitter from the 1920 Polish-Soviet War, Poland all but refused to enter in accordance with the Soviet Union, even against a common enemy (Germany).¹⁵⁴ Yet, under pressure from both Parliament and his Chiefs of Staff - and despite his insistence that "the chief trouble is with Russia. I confess to being deeply suspicious of her" – Chamberlain nonetheless engaged in negotiations with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly, British ambassadors encountered little success with their Russian counterparts. By August, negotiations broke down completely. Chamberlain, writing to Halifax, echoed the difficulty in securing Soviet cooperation: "In the end I think much will depend on the attitude of Poland and Roumania. If bringing Russia in meant their

¹⁵⁴ Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement*, 46-194.

¹⁵⁵ NA: CAB 140/149/25, Neville Chamberlain to unknown, April 29th, 1939. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

running out I should think the change was a very disastrous one.”¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, in the eyes of Chamberlain, Germany and the Soviet Union – as staunch ideological enemies – would remain perpetually antagonistic, leaving the Soviet Union a de facto ally of Britain. This sentiment, however, left Chamberlain, as well as all of England, utterly stunned when in late August Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact. Indeed, although the Foreign Office was aware of Soviet-German negotiations, it dismissed them in large part as posturing. In the days following the announcement, this intelligence failure, in both Parliament and the public, crystallized the reality of war. Several thousand fled London, fearful of an impending German air assault. Chamberlain’s efforts to secure a coalition surrounding German expansion – one powerful enough to negotiate from a position of strength – had failed. Almost overnight, the only deterrent standing between Hitler and Poland was the Anglo-French alliance. The lines had essentially been drawn; Europe stood on the precipice of war.

The BUF, in facing these circumstances, obstinately campaigned for peace. “The policy to which British Union rallies the people,” wrote Oswald Mosley, “is clear cut: 1) Disinterest in the East of Europe; 2) Disarmament in return in the West of Europe; 3) Return of Mandated Colonies, which we do not require; 4) Retention and intensive development of our Imperial heritage, which is now neglected for foreign quarrels.”¹⁵⁷ This peace campaign, of course, did not preclude, or even conflict, with the BUF campaign against Judaism. Their spurious machinations engendered war; to eliminate their iniquitous, pervading influence would almost certainly, according to the BUF,

¹⁵⁶ NA: CAB 140/149/24, Neville Chamberlain to Viscount Halifax, May 21st, 1939. *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

¹⁵⁷ Sir Oswald Mosley, “The Permanent Waver: Government’s Foreign Policy,” *Action*, April 1st, 1939, University of Birmingham Special Collections (hereafter UBSC), Birmingham.

secure peace. “In simple truth,” contended Mosley, “the Government is in danger of falling between every stool. They would have achieved appeasement if they had boldly declared the end of the Russian association and the return of mandated colonies. The power of the Jewish interests, which command alike the financial international and the Red international, prevented the former, and the stupidity of the Conservative party prevented the latter.”¹⁵⁸ By September 1939, with war all but certain, Mosley and the BUF continued their doomed campaign for peace. Though membership numbers increased – to roughly 20,000 – the campaign ultimately proved inconsequential.¹⁵⁹ The BUF remained, for all intents and purposes, the last bastion of pro-German conviction in a country determined to combat Hitler and the Nazis.

¹⁵⁸ UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “The Permanent Waver: Government’s Foreign Policy,” *Action*, April 1st, 1939.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt* (London: Penguin, 2006), 289.

IV. THE WAR WE WANT IS A WAR ON WANT: MOSLEY, INTERNMENT, AND THE OUTBREKA OF WAR

At the September 1st declaration of war, Mosley predictably opposed the conflict. He had contended for nearly five years that international finance had manipulated Britain into inciting conflict with Germany. The joint, but uncoordinated, German and Russian invasion of Poland – the source of hostilities – validated, for Mosley, his conspiratorial assertions: “Russia has attacked Poland in precisely the same manner that Germany attacked Poland, with one difference. Warning was given long in the advance of the coming German action if a satisfactory settlement was not reached concerning the Germany City of Danzig and the German minorities in Poland.”¹⁶⁰ The German invasion of Poland provoked Britain into declaring war on Germany. Why then, wondered Mosley, did the corresponding attack by Russia – a campaign exacerbated by its ostensible subterfuge – not solicit a similar declaration of war? For Mosley, this apparent contradiction validated his contention that Britain held Germany to a double standard: “Soviet Russia, on the other hand, treacherously changed sides at the last moment, and stabbed in the back the Poles, whose ‘small nations’ cause they had promised to befriend. If therefore, the British Government, according to its principles, had any reason to declare war upon Germany, it has double reason forthwith to declare war upon Russia.”¹⁶¹ Yet, despite his conspiratorial claims, Mosley nevertheless

¹⁶⁰ UBSC: “More War?” *Action*, September 23rd, 1939.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

maintained his national pride, and urged his followers to support the British armed services. The government, however, heavily censored the pages of *Action*, and within months of hostilities interned roughly 750 high-level BUF members. In his final message to British Fascists, Mosley encouraged his followers to oppose the war on moral, ideological, and political grounds, but to support it nonetheless. “Now British Union will continue our work of awakening the people until peace be won, and the until the People’s State of British Union is born by the declared will of the British People. To our Members my message is plain and clear. Our country is involved in war...It is sufficient to say that a war cannot be fought every twenty years to prevent any remedy of the injustices in the Peace Treaty which concluded the previous war. So to our people I give myself for the winning of peace.”¹⁶² Interned until 1943, and subsequently restricted to house arrest, Mosley never again enjoyed any measure of political prominence. His fascist allegiance, combined with the atrocities of Nazism, completely discredited his politics, and relegated his post-war standing to infamy.

During World War II, many of Mosley’s followers attempted to continue BUF activities, with several going so far as to commit treason. Mosley, however, never possessed a premeditated agenda of treason. Members of the BUF, however, did; and, as their leader, Mosley warrants a certain culpability for supplying the vehicle of this sedition. Indeed, Mosley crafted an excessively pro-German organization (with a ubiquitous pro-German foreign policy) that Nazi sympathizers – at least on an ideological plane – selectively embraced. These adherents, in their adoption of party dogma, intentionally embraced and augmented an already plethoric pro-German ideology, while

¹⁶² UBSC: Sir Oswald Mosley, “Mosley’s Message,” *Action*, September 16th, 1939.

altogether disregarding the guiding (and essentially moderating) hand of Mosley. As leader of the BUF, Mosley, on several occasions, challenged this ideological re-orientation. These efforts, however, proved inconsequential. Ultimately, Mosley created an excessively pro-German organization that functioned as a lightning rod for treasonous members of society. His complicit loyalty towards Germany arose from the ashes of his radicalization. The first stage in this campaign occurred between 1933 and 1935, when after the notorious ‘Olympia Rally’ Mosley embraced explicit anti-Semitic overtones as part of a platform that glorified Hitler and his animosity towards Judaism. During 1936 and until 1939, as fanatical and extremist elements within society (attracted to pro-Nazi propaganda) flooded the BUF, Mosley cultivated an overwhelming campaign in support of Germany’s radical ideology. Finally, after the breakdown of appeasement – and the corresponding outbreak of hostilities in September of 1939 – Mosley ultimately failed at constraining the rampant pro-German orientation of his party, leading to treasonous acts once war broke out. In the end, Mosley believed constriction was impossible; that these extremists composed too critical a position within the BUF. As a result, he acceded to their collective ideology, and essentially christened his movement as a beacon of treason.

As principle architect of BUF ideology, Mosley vigilantly promoted his party’s political reputation. The reality of his constituency, however, forced Mosley to adopt a much more radical agenda. Implementing explicit anti-Semitism and a pro-Hitler creed, in particular, significantly affected the BUF’s constituency. Waves of radical anti-Semitic and pro-German supporters – as early as 1934 – flooded BUF membership ranks. Mosley, up until the Olympia rally, guided his party’s ideology away from this extremism. However, after these activist enlisted, Mosley abandoned this top-down

approach of ideological formation and began adopting his member's extremism. This was, perhaps, exacerbated by the excessively bureaucratic organization structure Mosley had created, which left the majority of communication and ideological formation in the hands of a select few. That is not to say this extremism did not exist before the Olympia Rally; only that the surge in radical elements after Olympia (a direct result of Mosley's explicit anti-Semitism) complemented existing elements, and eventually formed an overwhelming majority that Mosley chose to embrace.

Despite acceding to this extremism, Mosley lacked accordance with the radical discourse spouted by those within his party. He sought power, and simply used an irascible ideology as means to seize it. In the wake of Olympia, with BUF anti-Semitism attracting extremist members, Mosley realized true political power had already eluded his grasp, and so he chose to appropriate the radical elements flooding his movement. While this severed the already fleeting chance of legitimate political power, it nonetheless secured a measure of political power. Mosley, by 1935, was the public leader of British Fascism: a movement associated with violence towards Jews and peace with Germany. However, internally, within the BUF, Mosley was forced to pacify the overwhelming contingent in support of Germany's radical ideology. This eventually created a situation in which Mosley was no longer chief architect of party policy. Pro-German extremists like William Joyce and Raven A. Thompson exerted a mounting influence, and significantly altered the orientation of party allegiance. Mosley – hampered by his decisions to advertise and later radicalize – lacked alternative solutions. As a result, though not necessarily a 'true believer,' Mosley embraced and patronized radicals that significantly altered the BUF into a pro-German organization.

These Nazi supporters, rapidly convening within the BUF, infiltrated every level of the BUF hierarchy, and often left little uncertainty as to where their loyalty lied. At the highest level, William Joyce, BUF deputy leader and Director of Propaganda, orchestrated the post-Olympia philosophical shift from economic revisionism to anti-Semitism. Joyce also insisted that the BUF adjust its name to “British Union of Fascists and National Socialists” to strengthen the parties connection to Nazism. An ardent anti-Semite, Joyce argued that an alleged Jewish cabal had subverted Britain’s economic strength while creating artificial strife with Germany: “They must be made to learn through iron experience that, having fought Germany once in a British quarrel, our people will not fight Germany again in a Jewish quarrel. British prestige has been ruined and our nation has been brought to the verge of war.”¹⁶³ Joyce’s passionate rhetoric, though contagious (to some), ultimately proved damning. Shortly after elections in 1937, Mosley contracted party membership, excising Joyce and other prominent anti-Semites. Mosley attributed the decision to dwindling funds and a change in ideology (from primarily anti-Semitic to primarily anti-War). Yet behind the scenes Joyce described Mosley as “losing his grip on affairs and suffering from neurosis,”¹⁶⁴ while Mosley ignored Joyce altogether. Within the party structure, Neil Francis Hawkins, Director General of Organization, had amassed considerable power. After ingratiating himself to Mosley, Hawkins attempted to absorb the propaganda, policy, and publicity divisions led by Joyce, John Beckett, and Alexander Raven Thompson respectively. Hawkins (naturally) met resistance, leading – as the Home Office described it – to an “internal

¹⁶³ William Joyce, *Fascism and Jewry* (London: BUF Publications, 1936), 6.

¹⁶⁴ KV 2-245/14/5, Special Branch Report, “Extract of Report Relating to William Joyce,” *Records of the Security Service*, National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

crisis at Head Quarters, which may have far reaching effects on the future of the movement.”¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, Mosley discharged Joyce, and re-consolidated party power under his vigilant eye.

Public perception, however, sustained a connection between the two men. Both were fascists; and along those lines, Joyce’s fanatical ranting (when combined with his 5 year tenure in the BUF), created a permanent association with Mosley. Even after the government disbanded the BUF, newspapers described Joyce as “one of Oswald Mosley’s most famous speakers,”¹⁶⁶ or the “one time propaganda director of the British Union of Fascists.”¹⁶⁷ This association, in a pre-war context, attached a pro-German and violent anti-Semitic association to the BUF. During the war, however, this association proved utterly devastating. In 1939, with conflict imminent, Joyce fled Britain for Germany. Five years later, in a newspaper article entitled “Why I Left,” Joyce boisterously declared “never have I regretted that decision. The German people today have the valuable and clear knowledge that their victory will be of positive value to them. Despite the reverses and disappointments which they have experienced, they are convinced that the final victory will be theirs. And I mean that it really will be theirs.”¹⁶⁸ During his stint in Germany, Joyce conducted anti-British radio telecasts under the pseudonym ‘Lord Haw-haw of Zeesen.’ Foremost among this propaganda was Joyce’s assertion that Britain had been duped into war: “These politicians cannot, or will not, or dare not tell the people they were led into this war and they know full well that all the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ “The Joyce Voice,” *News Review*, April 4th, 1940.

¹⁶⁷ “Lord Haw-Haw’s Tells: He’s an Englishman!” *London Times*, February 23rd, 1943.

¹⁶⁸ NA: KV 2-245/14/9, William Joyce, “News on the News: My Decision to Join the Nazis,” *Records of the Security Service*.

sacrifices which have been made by their undeclared aims will find no recompense in the aftermath of the conflict.”¹⁶⁹ After the war, Joyce was captured and found guilty of treason. Hanged in 1946, Joyce ultimately aided in the radicalization (and to some degree, damnation) of the BUF – both internally and in public perception – through his recruitment, propaganda, and war-time broadcasts.

Though the most extreme case, Joyce was but one in the mosaic of radicalization that guided Mosley’s movement to treason. Regional directors (mid-level members), like Ernest Godfrey Clarke, emulated the rancorous and often violent anti-Semitic rhetoric of Joyce. One of the BUF’s most active orators, Clarke consistently spewed diatribes claiming that Jews controlled Britain and sought war with Germany: “This government, as soon as it is threatened by a load of greasy scum on the streets of the East End of London, shows its weakness by again bowing down to the Jewish rabble. Is that the kind of Government that British people can put their faith in? We see the Government, on the one hand, attempting to plunge this country into war with nations [Germany and Italy] who desire to be on friendly terms with us and yet that same government is frightened by a few pink bows, led by Harry Pollittzer, the synthetic Jew, and the Chief Rabbi.”¹⁷⁰ Clarke’s odium notoriously lacked forethought; and often left him in police headquarters. In 1937, after the government had banned the BUF Blackshirt, Clarke publicly chastised “this spineless national government. Do you see how they have got Wobbly Willy to ban the blackshirt for the next six weeks? Naturally, they think we are going to take it rather

¹⁶⁹ NA: KV 2-245/14/16, Inspector Hunt, “Transcript of Notes taken by Inspector Hunt, Special Branch, New Scotland Yard, of a Broadcast heard at B.B.C. Studios between 10:40pm and 10:50pm,” July 14th, 1944, *Records of the Security Service*,.

¹⁷⁰ NA: MEPO 2-360/5/8, P.S. Jordan, “Transcript of Notes made by P.S. Jordan of a Speech by E.G. Clarke at a Meeting of the British Union of Fascists held at Victoria Park Square,” June 26th, 1937, *Records of the Metropolitan Office*.

badly, so they draft policemen into this area from all over London in case we run riot.”¹⁷¹
With such a notorious agitator, the police typically arrived – as Clarke pointed out – to prevent a riot. However, in this particular case Clarke was incorrect; the police had arrived to arrest him, for “using insulting words whereby a breach of the peace was likely to be occasioned.”¹⁷²

William Joyce and Ernest Godfrey Clarke – a senior member and regional director, respectively – proved two of the movement’s most vocal pro-German advocates. Yet down the hierarchy, among regular membership, lies more evidence of pro-German sentiments. Roland Joseph Birch, BUF member and teacher at Harrow County School, orchestrated regular visits for his students to participate in the Hitler Youth. Speaking at an internment meeting, Birch recalled the seductive allure of Hitler’s Germany: “Then there was the skill of his foreign policy, what seemed to be his ideals, and the speeches he made. I suppose my admiration reached the peak in his achievement of the Austrian Anschluss.”¹⁷³ Though renouncing Hitler once war commenced – and arrested under the jurisdiction of defense regulation 1-8b – Birch nonetheless remained a conscientious objector.

In 1937, with international tensions (along with BUF radicalization) increasing, Mosley realized the ardent pro-German orientation of his members might soon become associated with treason. Accordingly, he attempted to purge the most violent pro-German members within his party, including John Beckett and William Joyce. While eliminating

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ NA: HO 45/23783/17, George Moore, “Transcript of Notes of Advisory Committee to Consider Appeals Against Orders of Internment for Roland Joseph Birch,” April 9th, 1942, *Records of the Home Office*.

certain extreme elements, Mosley's efforts largely proved inconsequential. The BUF, and Mosley in particular, had cultivated a reputation exalting Hitler; to abort this platform unilaterally would alienate a large portion of the party's existing constituency. Mosley had essentially constricted his available options; and eventually found himself embracing the remaining pro-German elements within his party. Upon coming to terms with this reality – and essentially accepting the treasonous, pro-German ideology of his constituency – Mosley, though not necessarily a true believer, nurtured an atmosphere of sedition.

This environment, rife with pro-German sentiment, copiously exhibited its treasonous ideology once war commenced. The pervasive fear of the Fifth Column, or a “body of people within a country working for the enemy country,” suffused British culture.¹⁷⁴ As a result, high level members of the BUF – an organization noted for its pro-German disposition – were detained by the government under Defense Regulation 1-8b. Most notably, Mosley was interned “as one of the persons in control of the organization, who has or has had associations with persons concerned in the Government of Germany, a power with which his Majesty is at war.”¹⁷⁵ Mosley's association with radical German sympathizers not only altered the ideology of his movement, but involved him in a web of treasonous activities. As leader of the BUF, Mosley embodied its philosophy; and in allowing his members to conspire to commit treasonous activities, Mosley essentially, in the eyes of the government, was an accessory to these same acts. As a result, the government connected the BUF's ideology to Mosley's, and interned him

¹⁷⁴ NA: KV 4-140/12/7, Home Office, “Certain Instances of Traitorous Activities on the part of Members of the British Union,” January 19th, 1945, *Records of the Security Service*.

¹⁷⁵ NA: KV 2-884/14/5, “Statement of Case Against Oswald Mosley,” June 19th, 1940, *Records of the Security Service*.

for the simple reason that “the object of the British Union is to replace the present system of Government in Great Britain with the system of Government now obtaining in Germany.”¹⁷⁶

In addition to Mosley, a great majority of the senior officials within the BUF were also detained. Their public ideology festered a general uneasiness once war broke out. Even the term ‘Fifth Column’ had “by common consent become attached to the British Union, the largest body of pro-Nazis in this country and the only one which was of any serious importance.”¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, the government interned high-level BUF members to prevent seditious acts. They had become, for all intents and purposes, the fifth column manifested. Mosley, though “quite sincere in deprecating anything in the nature of espionage, sabotage, preparations for receiving parachutists, etc,”¹⁷⁸ had nonetheless created a treasonous movement rife with pro-German ideology.

Quite unsurprisingly, member devotion to this ideology never waned, even when faced with sedition. The dismantling of BUF organizational structure through the interment of the leadership likewise had little effect. These radical BUF members longed for a fascist government; and intended to aid Germany to achieve it. The government, in response, compiled “evidence of a continuance of underground British Union Activity since the detention of the district officials of the British Union.”¹⁷⁹ BUF members, even without a formal organization, sustained their seditious intentions. In Leeds, for example, the government encountered “a few men, members of the British Union, of whom we

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ NA: KV 4-140/12/15, “The Present Position of the British Union of Fascists,” July 7th, 1949, *Records of the Security Service*.

¹⁷⁸ “Certain Instances of Traitorous Activities..”

¹⁷⁹ NA: “The Present Position of the British Union of Fascists.”

have evidence of disloyalty... We know one to be disloyal and in touch with three or four other members who discuss means of assisting the enemy, and indeed are prepared to sell their country (they would no doubt say that in selling England to Hitler they were acting patriotically, since they believe that in Fascism and Nazism lies the salvation of their country).”¹⁸⁰ Despite Mosley’s sincere protestations against treason, members of his movement were quite prepared to commit it.

Leeds would eventually prove a common occurrence. During the war, in Devonshire, the government intercepted an unsigned letter containing “information concerning damaged battleships, which would have been of value to the enemy.”¹⁸¹ The intended recipient, a DuVivior, “had been a British Union District Treasurer,” and “had become friendly with another member of British Union, one Crowle, at Devonport.”¹⁸² A check on Crowle’s “correspondence confirmed he was an active member of the British Union and pro-Nazi in his sentiments.”¹⁸³ Eventually, the government discovered the letter containing military intelligence had been composed by Crowle; and that “DuVivior was about to pass on the information to Raven A. Thompson, the editor of ‘Action.’”¹⁸⁴ Both Crowle and DuVivier were immediately arrested: “it was clear from DuVivier’s correspondence and to a lesser extent from Crowle’s that the sympathies of these men were entirely with Germany.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ NA: “Certain Instances of Traitorous Activities.”

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Quite surprisingly, in seeking this seditious information, BUF members often lacked the means to communicate properly with the enemy. In fact, long before war commenced “the Germans realized it would be bad to use such a large and conspicuous organization like the BUF for secret activities of a military nature.”¹⁸⁶ As a result, when the BUF actually possessed confidential information, it often remained with the BUF: “There would seem to be no concerted plan of action in the event of an invasion and the organization as a whole would not seem to be in touch with the Germans. We can only say that members of the British Union are often anxious to assist the enemy and are prepared to take steps to do so on their own account.”¹⁸⁷ That BUF members committed unsolicited treason is, in many respects, more damning than if they had been coerced. To voluntarily commit sedition, without the prospect of reward or benefit, illustrates the degree to which BUF members championed Nazism.

This espousal, as committed as it was widespread, almost unilaterally contradicted Mosley’s original intention for the BUF. Upon its creation, Mosley envisioned the BUF capitalizing on rampant Fascist popularity and developing into a political force. But as its leader, Mosley – exhibiting a considerable lack of political acumen – adopted an excessively pro-German ideology. Articles lambasting the British Government, while simultaneously exalting Germany, developed into a frequent occurrence:

Proudly can this organization claim some measure of praise for its success in unveiling the cant and bellicosity of Labour and Conservative Parties; for offering the British public an opportunity to hear the truth; for challenging the vendetta of financiers against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy; for exposing collective security as leading to collective war; for denouncing the League as a hollow fraud perpetrated by the jew-ridden French Government for the destruction of European Civilization... the policy pursued during these four past years has been based upon a realistic outlook which alone is capable of

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

bringing peace to a distracted world and unity to the Empire. The regenerated Germany must be accepted as one of the Great Powers liberated from the chains of the Versailles Treaty, and restored to the community of nations as an equal and not as a criminal under remand.¹⁸⁸

As a result, Mosley's movement "was of such a nature that it was inevitable that from time to time individual members, or even in some cases district branches, should feel impelled to do something more dramatic for the National Socialist cause than the humdrum work of political propaganda and organization."¹⁸⁹ Yet this was only the beginning. As Mosley, in the wake of the Olympia Rally, adopted a vitriolic anti-Semitic tone, BUF radicalization increased exponentially. Soon pro-Nazis, eager to support Germany (even if it mean betrayal), flooded the BUF, and utilized their overwhelming zeal to re-orient party ideology. Mosley, though attempting to regain full control of his movement, could not do so without sacrificing these radical members (and thus, the movement itself). As a result, he complied with this subversion, and utilized his considerable rhetoric and propaganda talents to further ingratiate his movement to Nazism. So much so, that by the time war broke out, "the B.U. lost no time in proclaiming it to be a 'Jews War.' The effect of all this propaganda was to make a large proportion of the B.U. so pro-German that they were prepared to give assistance to the enemy. In one district we have just learned that ex-British Union members have managed to carry on in spite of the recent action taken against the movement."¹⁹⁰

Whether through the condemnation of Jews, the creation of a BUF Munich branch, participation in Nazi rallies, or general pro-Nazi sentiments, Oswald Mosley deliberately fostered an excessive pro-German ideology within the British Union of

¹⁸⁸ UBSC: R. Gordon Canning, "Our Foreign Policy in Review," *Action*, October 2nd, 1937.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Fascists. This, combined with several critical, and ultimately ruinous decisions, radicalized the movement. Eventually, the BUF that had once championed economic reform (as a means to rise out of depression) gave way to a radical, and ultimately treasonous, movement. This sedition – an unintended outgrowth of Mosley’s foreign policy – nonetheless contributes substantial insight into the nature of Chamberlain’s foreign policy. As the architect behind BUF ideology, Mosley constructed and later preached his simple yet explicit message: “the British Union Stands for Peace.”¹⁹¹ This policy, though seemingly altruistic, was intentionally misconstrued by some to ingratiate the BUF to both Germany and Italy. By advocating peace (and not invasion), radical BUF members maintained the pretense of pacifistic loyalty while secretly preparing for an invasion that would surely thrust them into power. Indeed, these men ascertained that with Germany’s astonishing rearmament program, Britain need only sustain current production to squander military dominance. And so they, like Chamberlain, endorsed maintaining the status quo: peace.

¹⁹¹ NA: HO 45/25391/6, Oswald Mosley, “No War for Warsaw!,” June 28th, 1940, *Records of the Home Office*.

CONCLUSION

The vast destruction wrought by World War II, specifically the Holocaust, has brought British Fascism into the larger context of Fascist study. Historian Karl Dietrich Bracher, in his seminal work *The German Dictatorship*, has contended that the Fascist ideological front formed around four fundamental tenets: imperialistic nationalism, glorification of an all powerful state, a combination of social romanticism with state socialism, and a *volkish* community based on race.¹⁹² Individual Fascist governments emphasized different components of this doctrine; but as a collective group these governments subscribed to these tenets in one form or another. British Fascism, led by Oswald Mosley, incorporated these tenets in a failed bid to secure political power. Yet, despite subscribing to this generic framework, British Fascism ultimately proved a unique political movement. In embracing both British and Fascist tenets, Oswald Mosley and his movement blurred the ostensibly static line separating British character and German radicalism. Accordingly, in perceiving appeasement through the lens of British Fascism, Mosley emerges as a unique medium from which historians may ascertain the nature of appeasement. His seemingly contradictory character – at once a genteel, aristocratic, and fiercely patriotic Britain who, without compunction, embraced anti-Semitism, revolution, and German extremism – inimitably places him in the jurisdiction of both Chamberlain and Hitler. Indeed, in uniting the seemingly incongruous tenets of British tradition with

¹⁹² Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 10.

Nazi radicalism, Mosley essentially bridged the gap between Chamberlain and Hitler, positioning himself as a unique intermediary.

Along these lines, when placed in the context of appeasement historiography, the foreign policies of Oswald Mosley and Neville Chamberlain exhibit an acute alignment. This synergy – as unwitting as it was consistent – underscores the disparate treatments recorded in the subsequent historiography. Neville Chamberlain, resigning from his post as Prime Minister in May 1940 and passing away in early November, was categorically vilified by both public and the press. Many in the vein of Cato criticized his feeble and ineffective foreign policy for leading Britain to the precipice of destruction. Yet, despite the callous denigration heaped upon his defeated reputation, Chamberlain nonetheless maintained a fair level of Parliamentary support. Indeed, other than the Labour Party Parliament retained a certain respect and admiration for Chamberlain. In his own words, Chamberlain expressed little regret, writing in a letter to John Simon:

It was the hope of doing something to improve the conditions of life for the poorer people that brought me at past middle life into politics, and it is some satisfaction to me that I was able to carry out some part of my ambition, even though its permanency may be challenged by the destruction of war. For the rest I regret nothing that I have done & I can see nothing undone that I ought to have done. I am there content to accept the fate that has so suddenly overtaken me.¹⁹³

Yet, despite his unregretting temperament, as well as the support of his party, Chamberlain and appeasement suffered extensive criticism. The atrocities of war, combined with his failure to prevent it, left Chamberlain's political legacy, in large part, intractably injured.

Mosley, within this paradigm – and despite advocating a foreign policy much more severe than Chamberlain's – enjoyed mildly flattering accounts in the years after

¹⁹³ Robert Self, *Neville Chamberlain* (Ashgate: London), 446.

war. To be sure, a portion of this stemmed primarily from the magnitude separating Mosley and Chamberlain. Indeed, while Chamberlain commanded the will of the British Empire, Mosley, at the time of war, led a contingent of less than 2,000 active members. Accordingly, on some levels, this intrinsic irrelevance has led historians to consider Mosley “worthy of ribald mirth than fear.”¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the post-war depictions of Mosley have generally portrayed an intelligent, powerful, talented, though ultimately misguided individual who encountered an “inherent conservatism of the British people that created a cultural resistance to fascism.”¹⁹⁵

Only as revisionist and counter-revisionist arguments eroded the orthodox archetype did these evaluations come under further consideration. Indeed, in the years since World War II a trend towards increasingly rehabilitative accounts of Chamberlain – as well as progressively critical depictions of Mosley – has shaped the understanding of both men. Using these divergent, and previously independent, accounts, this thesis has analyzed the historiography of Neville Chamberlain and appeasement through the lens of Oswald Mosley and British Fascism. Ultimately, the congruent examination of Chamberlain and Mosley’s foreign policy has revealed an unexpected convergence between appeasement and ‘Britain for the British,’ indicating the degree to which Chamberlain’s rational policy ultimately supported radical fascist aims.

In the years leading up to World War II, Germany engineered a massive rearmament campaign that led Britain to believe it was at a distinct military disadvantage. No longer negotiating from a position of strength, the British Government – and Neville

¹⁹⁴ Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism After 1945* (London, I.B. Tauris), 2.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

Chamberlain in particular – was forced to placate Germany until its own rearmament program achieved relative parity with Hitler’s.¹⁹⁶ Yet Chamberlain, like Mosley, possessed a distinct abhorrence of war, and sought to ascertain “the best way of working to a more effective method of keeping the peace.”¹⁹⁷ In a practical sense, fundamental to this maintenance of peace was the curtailment of German aggression. Hitler – unpredictable in many facets – proved utterly consistent in his intentions to appropriate the Rhineland, Austria, and other segments of Eastern Europe. The maintenance of peace in Europe, for all intents and purposes, hinged on Chamberlain’s capacity to placate German aggression.¹⁹⁸

Within this context – namely, Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler – Mosley’s foreign policy can essentially be perceived as a more radical incarnation of Chamberlain’s. Both Mosley and Chamberlain, on a fundamental level, sought to avoid another war. In doing so, both men advocated an isolationist mentality when addressing regional conflicts such as Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War. Until March 1939, both men also accepted – Chamberlain through his actions and Mosley through his words – German dominance in Eastern Europe. And perhaps most important, both men endeavored to placate and befriend Hitler as a means to secure continental peace. The difference between the two, then, manifested in the degree with which they adopted and later advocated appeasement. The BUF sponsored an appeasement utterly compliant with German foreign policy. On a fundamental level,

¹⁹⁶ Self, 3-39.

¹⁹⁷CAB 140/149/4 Neville Chamberlain to Unknown, May 2nd, 1936. Records of the Cabinet Office, , National Archives (hereafter NA), London.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon & London, 2007), 180-265.

Mosley constructed his foreign policy around the extreme placation of Hitler which, in its manifestation, resulted in a policy predicated on placing German ideals – repudiation of Versailles, reclamation of territory, absorption of Eastern European nations – over their British counterparts: balance of power, self-determination, and a coalition against totalitarianism.

Chamberlain, forced to navigate Parliament's labyrinthine bureaucracy – while also possessing none of the radical anti-Semitism of Mosley – proffered a similar, albeit more pragmatic, foreign policy. In his actions at Czechoslovakia – as well as inaction in the wake of the *Anschluss* – Chamberlain skewed the balance of power towards Germany, robbed two countries of self-determination, and failed to cultivate an anti-fascist coalition. Yet, on many levels, Chamberlain's deployment of appeasement proved a rational response to German expansion. From the end of the First World War, Germany had appealed for the reclamation of the territory removed under the auspices of the Versailles Treaty. Beginning in 1936, when Germany had achieved rearmament sufficient enough to defend itself against violations of Versailles, Hitler embarked on a campaign to recoup these lands. From Chamberlain's perspective, up until the Czechoslovakian invasion in March 1939 this recuperation – and not continental dominance – was the extent of Hitler's territorial intentions. The Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland were all territories under German control – or at the very least possessing a majority of ethnic Germans – before the First World War. Hitler, then, merely sought the reappropriation of erstwhile German territories.

In addition, Chamberlain, as early as 1936, believed Germany had achieved distinct military superiority over Britain. Though the exact disparity between Anglo-

German military capacity has come under historiographical contention, Chamberlain nonetheless believed Germany possessed a significant edge. In this regard – and when combined with Hitler’s ostensibly terminal expansion – appeasement proved utterly necessary. It was, in large measure, “dictated by a realistic assessment of economic and military weakness and by British opinion.”¹⁹⁹ And yet, despite this pragmatism, appeasement ultimately catered to the fascist ideology. Oswald Mosley, in cultivating his foreign policy, advocated the dissolution of all European alliances at the expense of Anglo-German accordance. Germany – under this paradigm – would encounter no interference from Britain, and essentially dictate all territorial concerns within Europe. This was a program, in nearly every facet, constructed to aggrandize and assist Germany. It was, essentially, the program Hitler hoped Britain would adopt; and Chamberlain, restricted by a multitude of factors, found himself forced into adopting a more rational incarnation of it.

Yet, restricted and pragmatic as he was, Chamberlain cannot be unilaterally exonerated. Indeed, on a fundamental level, Chamberlain’s response to both British limitations and German expansion, though ostensibly logical, collapsed under the weight of his inability to grasp the irrationality of Germany’s territorial aims. Chamberlain – under the aegis of a policy predicated on territorial concessions – essentially sacrificed Austria, the Sudetenland, and Czechoslovakia. He did so under the impetus that these concessions would slake Germany’s expansionist thirst. Ultimately, however, the converse occurred, and Hitler interpreted appeasement not as a harbinger of Anglo-German accordance, but British frailty. Indeed, a week before

¹⁹⁹ R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 347.

the German invasion of Poland, Hitler boisterously derided Chamberlain, going so far as to imply that Chamberlain's actions at Munich crystallized German confidence in British diffidence: "The enemy did not expect my great determination. Our enemies are little worms, I saw them at Munich...Now Poland is in the position I wanted...I am only afraid that some bastard will present me with a mediation plan at the last moment."²⁰⁰

Had Chamberlain grasped the full scope of Hitler's territorial aspirations, he almost certainly would not have pursued an incarnation of appeasement that accelerated and accommodated Hitler's territorial agenda. Instead, he likely would have utilized a variance of appeasement meant to delay conflict while vigorous rearmament and the cultivation an anti-fascist coalition could be arranged. As it stood, however, Chamberlain, in seeking to placate Germany, adopted a more pragmatic incarnation of 'Britain for the British,' failing to understand that the inherent concessions elementary to this policy would embolden Hitler to escalate his already ambitious territorial aims.

Even after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 – the unmistakable collapse of appeasement – Chamberlain nonetheless expressed a strong conviction in the efficacy of his politics. Writing in April 1939, he noted with self deluded confidence his "conclusion that Hitler has received a definite check which will enormously affect his prestige."²⁰¹ Later that month, he once again expressed an assurance in the limitations of Hitler's territorial aims: "Yet in cold blood I cannot see

²⁰⁰ Adolf Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the Commanders in Chief," August 22nd, 1939, *German Historical Institute*, Washington D.C., <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/English56.pdf>.

²⁰¹ NA: CAB 140/149/19, Neville Chamberlain to Unknown, April 3rd, 1939, *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

Hitler starting a world war for Danzig.”²⁰² Mosley, writing a few months later, echoed a similar sentiment: “Why should Europe go to war over the administration of one small port? There is nothing here that cannot be settled by negotiation, if negotiations are allowed to proceed.”²⁰³ Hitler, according to both Mosley and Chamberlain, lacked the impetus to engage Britain in war if offered the appropriate conditions. For Chamberlain, this insistence, perhaps more than his inability to rearm or cultivate an anti-fascist coalition – underscores the critical degree of his misinterpretation. After the Czechoslovakian invasion, Hitler had essentially invalidated the notion that Germany would stop its expansion. Yet, despite this, Chamberlain, like Mosley, remained optimistic in the efficacy of appeasement, of further German autonomy in Eastern Europe. It was only when Foreign Secretary Halifax and Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office Sir Alexander Cadogan stewarded Chamberlain away from this placation – at the direction of the Conservative Party – that Chamberlain adopted a more authoritative position. Yet, by this time, Chamberlain’s faltering rearmament program, combined with the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement – which essentially eliminated the possibility of a formidable anti-Fascist coalition – left Britain to engage Germany from a position of weakness. Chamberlain had misunderstood Hitler’s expansionist aims, and employed a rational approach that simply could not fathom the aggressive nature of Hitler’s territorial aims.

This thesis has sought to contribute a deeper understanding of existing appeasement historiography through the congruent examination of Oswald Mosley

²⁰² NA: CAB 140/149/21, Neville Chamberlain to Unknown, April 29th, 1939, *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

²⁰³ “Hitler Opens Negotiations Over Danzig” *Action*, August 19th, 1939, University of Birmingham Special Collections (hereafter UBSC), Birmingham.

and Neville Chamberlain's foreign policies. Ultimately, in perceiving Chamberlain through the lens of Mosley, the eerie convergence of appeasement and fascism illustrates the severe lack of alternatives available to Chamberlain. Yet alternatives did exist – specifically accelerated rearmament and the cultivation of an anti-fascist coalition – and in that vein the conclusion of this thesis largely dovetails with the works of Peter Neville and R.A.C. Parker, generally considered counter-revisionists. Neville, Parker, and other counter-revisionists, however, have typically restricted their study of Chamberlain to high politics. This thesis has sought to expand the scope of this scholarship, including a domestic fascist movement – one possessing an extremist pro-German ideology – to better understand the appeasement paradigm.

Almost one year before the outbreak of war, in the wake of Munich, Chamberlain confidently asserted that Hitler, on a fundamental level, would keep his word: “In short I had established a certain confidence which was my aim and on my side in spite of the hardness and ruthlessness I thought I saw in his face I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word.”²⁰⁴ This impression, above all else, proved the source of appeasement's breakdown. Indeed, in the weeks before Munich, Chamberlain ostensibly recognized the inherent risk in a foreign policy constructed on his ability to accurately assess Hitler's intentions:

I fully realize that if eventually things go wrong and the aggression takes place there will be many, including Winston, who will say that the British Government must bear the responsibility and that if only they had had the courage to tell Hitler now that if he used force we should at once declare war that would have stopped him. By that point it will be impossible to prove the contrary, but I am satisfied that we should be

²⁰⁴ NA: CAB 140/149/9, Neville Chamberlain to Viscount Halifax, September 13th, 1938, *Records of the Cabinet Office*.

wrong to allow the most vital decision that any country could take, the decision as to peace or war, to pass out of our own hands, into those of a ruler of another country and a lunatic at that.²⁰⁵

Ultimately, Chamberlain, wedged between the severe appeasement of Mosley and the compelling belligerence of Churchill, accomplished neither. He failed to curtail German aggression in 1937, yet by 1939, with the guarantee of Poland, had placed the decision of war in Hitler's hands. Mosley, though not necessarily comprehending the extent of Hitler's territorial aims, advocated a foreign policy that rendered them inconsequential. Chamberlain, in adopting a pragmatic incarnation of this policy, not only exhibited a similarly fundamental misunderstanding of German expansion, but – unlike Mosley – predicated his foreign policy on his aptitude in gauging it.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

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