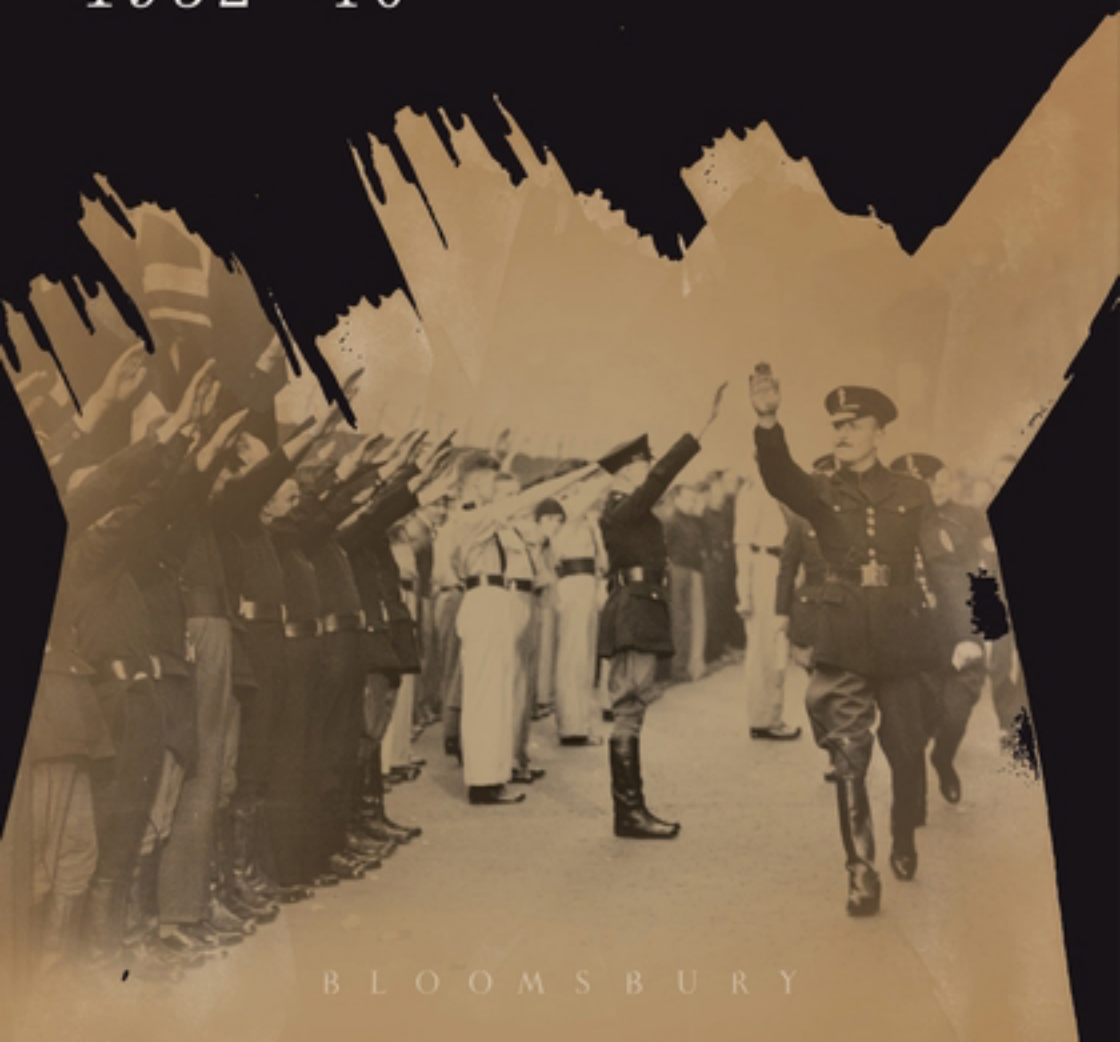


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DANIEL TILLES

BRITISH FASCIST ANTISEMITISM AND JEWISH RESPONSES 1932–40



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British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–40

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*In memory of Professor David Cesarani, my former doctoral supervisor,
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List of Abbreviations

AJEX	Jewish Ex-Servicemen's Legion (from 1939, Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen)
AJY	Association of Jewish Youth
AJFS	Association of Jewish Friendly Societies
BF	British Fascisti/Fascists
BUD	British Union of Democrats
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CoC	Co-ordinating Committee (from 1938, Jewish Defence Committee)
CMSJ	Council of Manchester and Salford Jews
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
EMAF	Ex-Servicemen's Movement Against Fascism
FQ	<i>Fascist Quarterly</i>
FW	<i>Fascist Week</i>
IFL	Imperial Fascist League
JC	<i>Jewish Chronicle</i>
JLC	Jewish Labour Council
JPC	Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism
JUDA	Jewish United Defence Association
LAC	London Area Council
LBWS	Legion of Blue and White Shirts
LCC	London County Council
LJY	League of Jewish Youth
MCP	Militant Christian Patriots
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NL	Nordic League
NSL	National Socialist League
NWF	New World Fellowship
POA	Public Order Act
TAC	Trades Advisory Council
YCL	Young Communist League

General Introduction

Fascism and antisemitism are not subjects that have been neglected by scholars. Neither, despite a relative lack of severity by comparison to their European counterparts, have British manifestations of these two phenomena struggled for academic attention. Indeed, British fascism's explicit hostility towards Jews – unprecedented in the country's political life – is the aspect of its history that has left the strongest imprint on collective memory. Similarly, the targets of this campaigning, Britain's Jews, have not, especially given their small number, been wanting for research. In particular, their experiences of and responses to domestic fascism in the 1930s have come to be regarded as a central feature of modern Anglo-Jewish history.

Nevertheless, there remain significant gaps within, as well as between, these fields. The burgeoning discipline of fascist studies, for example, has had relatively little to say on antisemitism's position within fascist ideology,¹ while it has also devoted scant attention to fascism's British variant. Work dedicated to British fascism has, equally, tended to make minimal reference to developments in the wider field of fascist studies, or to locate its subject within this context.² Moreover, while the importance of antisemitism to British fascist history is recognized, the forms that it took and the ways in which it was presented, as well as its relationship to fascist ideology and to native patterns of anti-Jewish thought, have been explored only fragmentarily.³ Similarly, scholars of British antisemitism have at times been guilty of disregarding domestic fascism, partly as a result of its relative obscurity but also, perhaps, because of a desire to move away from the study of 'Continental' types of extreme and politicized antisemitism and towards the divination of more indigenous forms of prejudice.⁴

Work on British fascism and anti-fascism, meanwhile, has tended to touch only incidentally upon Jewish forms of opposition. Where they have been explored in their own right, accounts tend to be rather static and simplistic, concentrating almost exclusively on just one brief period and sketching a dichotomy between two, allegedly opposing forms of reaction. Moreover, researchers of all stripes have focused primarily upon the activity favoured by just one section of Anglo-Jewry – young, working-class Jews of recent immigrant extraction, who pursued an active, confrontational approach to fascism – to the exclusion of other groups.⁵ Above all, despite the histories of interwar British fascism and Anglo-Jewry being so closely intertwined, the two have been examined largely in isolation, with studies tending to approach their relationship exclusively from the perspective of one side or the other. Scholars of British fascism rely little on Anglo-Jewish sources and vice versa, resulting in accounts that fail to offer comprehensive and balanced coverage. Indeed, the present work is the first to bring the two together, helping shed new light on both.

The first part of this study will focus on British fascist antisemitism, taking as its main subject Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF), by some distance the country's most prominent and sophisticated interwar fascist organization.⁶ It will examine how and when antisemitism was incorporated into the party's ideology and programme; the ways in which anti-Jewish sentiment was expressed in its discourse over time; and what beliefs and motivations underlay these developments.⁷ These insights will then be used to reflect on broader issues.

These include, first of all, the question of whether antisemitism, which was initially absent from the party's official programme, should be regarded an authentic element of its ideology, or if, instead, it was an artificial addition to it, forced upon the BUF's leadership by external or internal forces, or exploited by them for cynical political gain. The role of Mosley, the movement's dominant figure, in this process will also be considered. Second, the study will assess the degree to which the fascists' antisemitism stemmed from indigenous attitudes towards Jews, or, by contrast, how far it was inspired by foreign influences. Additionally, the ways in which the BUF's anti-Jewish position related to – and affected relations with – other groups on the British and European radical right will be touched upon. Finally, the above will provide the basis for discussion of the wider relationship between antisemitism and fascism as a generic phenomenon, and in particular the extent to which the former – or any other form of exclusionary prejudice – is inherent to the latter, and why.

Subsequently, attention will turn to the ways in which Britain's Jews reacted to the emergence, for the first time in British history, of an explicitly antisemitic political party with a substantial base of support. By surveying a far broader range of Jewish responses to domestic fascism over the period 1932–40 than previous accounts – and by revealing how they evolved, overlapped and interacted with one another – a more comprehensive and representative picture will emerge. This, in turn, will provide a framework within which to examine a number of other themes.

First, the question of why Jewish approaches to fascism evolved over time will be discussed: the extent to which this was, on the one hand, a response to external circumstances – such as the changing nature of the fascist threat – or whether, on the other, it was driven internally, by discussion among Jews themselves. The effect that this 'defence debate' had on relations between various sections of Britain's Jewish community will also be explored in depth, and related to wider shifts in the balance of communal power during this period. We will also observe the role that Jews played in Britain's anti-fascist movement, and how they interacted with the various other groups, institutions and individuals who were opposed to fascism. Finally, the issue of identity will be considered: the ways in which responses to fascism were influenced by – and how, in turn, they influenced – Jews' sense of their Britishness and Jewishness, and the balance between them.

By scrutinizing British fascist antisemitism and Jewish responses side by side in this way, this study will also be able to assess the impact that the two had on one another. This, first of all, will comprise an assessment of the concept of 'interactionism'. This is an idea that, while not always given this specific label, has become firmly established in the historiography of British fascism, referring to an alleged vicious circle that developed

over the 1930s: early Jewish hostility towards the fascists encouraged the latter to adopt antisemitism as official policy, which in turn exacerbated Jewish antagonism, thereby further hardening the fascists' stance. This premise will be re-examined, with the relationship between the two sides, and their influence (or lack of influence) on one another, explored in detail. Second – and related to this – the effectiveness of Jewish efforts to restrict the fascists' activity, thwart their political ambitions and counteract their antisemitic propaganda will be analysed.

While this book will, then, both cover new ground and reconsider certain established views, it also faces the question of significance: why is its subject matter important? This is an issue that has perennially confronted historians of British fascism and Anglo-Jewry, both of which can appear to be of limited historical relevance and interest, not only on an international scale, but even in the British context.

In his seminal *History of Fascism*, for instance, Stanley Payne devotes just a page and a half of text to what he describes as the 'political oxymoron' of British fascism, remarking that the voluminous historiography devoted to the subject can appear 'inversely proportionate' to its actual significance.⁸ More bluntly, Anthony Julius, in his study of English antisemitism, argues that the country's fascists

contributed nothing to the understanding of their times; they included no thinkers or strategists of distinction or even mediocrity; there was nothing original or even engaging in their programmes; they produced nothing of political or cultural value; their newsletters and pamphlets were dreary, somewhat hysterical and most of all just *wrong* about the events they reported.⁹

In a similar vein, David Vital's *The Jews in Europe* describes the experience of Britain's Jews as something of an 'oddity' when compared to that of their co-religionists elsewhere on the continent. The British historian David Cannadine is even more forthright, arguing that, due to Anglo-Jewry's small size, high level of assimilation, and the relative lack of prejudice and hostility it faced, its history is 'little more than a bland and lukewarm chronicle', one that 'in the context of international history ... is neither very interesting, nor very exciting ... [and] in the context of British history ... just not that important'.¹⁰

Yet, while Britain's fascists and Jews may superficially appear peripheral, there are important reasons for their histories – and the intersections between them – to be acknowledged, understood and incorporated into the wider scholarship. Far from being outliers, both individually provide instructive and representative examples of broader developments, and taken together contribute to an understanding of the relationship between Jews and fascists across interwar Europe.

Payne's jibe towards British fascism notwithstanding, the trend in fascist studies over recent decades has been to take more seriously the study of smaller, less successful fascist movements, and to use them to refine our understanding of fascism as a generic phenomenon. As Roger Griffin argues, Italian Fascism and German Nazism, despite dominating the scholarship, should actually be regarded as 'freak examples' of fascism. They were the only two interwar fascist parties that were able to form

regimes, making them exceptions to the general rule of fascist failure across the rest of interwar Europe. Instead, he believes, it was the much wider range of small, 'abortive' movements that better characterized the way in which fascism developed.¹¹ Taking the case even further, Zeev Sternhell claims that the inevitable compromises forced upon any political movement once it reaches power mean that it is only smaller opposition groups that offer a 'pure ... unmuddled' version of fascism.¹² In this light, the BUF – a small party, but with a clearly defined, consistent and undoubtedly 'fascist' ideology – provides a case study on the use of antisemitism by fascist parties that is both valuable in its own right and, as we shall see, sheds light on broader trends that have received relatively little academic attention.

Additionally, as both Griffin and Robert Paxton contend, the fortunes of individual fascist parties were dictated as much by environmental factors as by their inherent qualities.¹³ This, first of all, reinforces the notion that a lack of political success should not in itself diminish the importance of studying a particular strain of fascism. But it also emphasizes the importance of both understanding those external conditions that caused fascism to fail and discerning any common factors that made this failure so pervasive across interwar Europe.

In Britain the countervailing forces against fascism were manifold. Most obviously, its development was hindered by the country's inhospitable political culture, with its tradition of stability and gradual change, an electoral system that inhibits the progress of small parties, and widespread acceptance of liberal democracy. (Griffin warns, however, against the 'Whiggish belief' that Britain's political culture was somehow uniquely resistant to extremism. Fascism was, he notes, stymied by 'structural feature[s] of all but the most defective liberal democracies anywhere in the world'.)¹⁴ In addition to such intrinsic impediments, fascism was also constrained by the broad opposition it aroused in Britain. Indeed, these two sets of inhibitory factors were closely related to one another, with Nigel Copsey arguing that the study of anti-fascism 'tell[s] us much about the popular resilience or otherwise of "democratic" values in the inter-war period'.¹⁵ Jews, as we shall see, played an integral role across Britain's spectrum of anti-fascist forces, one that has not been fully acknowledged as an explanatory factor in the suppression and marginalization of British fascism.

The story of this highly effective resistance to fascism in Britain also has wider relevance for European Jewish history, as an alternative narrative of the relationship between Jews and fascists during the interwar period and Second World War. Attention in this regard has, understandably, focused on Nazi Germany and the territories that fell under its sphere of influence, resulting in a prevalent perception of Jews as victims of, refugees from or heroic but ultimately doomed rebels against fascism. Jürgen Matthäus and Mark Roseman caution in the introduction to their volume on Jewish responses to Nazi persecution in Germany that, as much as they hope to present Jews 'as actors, not simply as passive witnesses', the 'massive imbalance in the power relationship' between Jews and their fascist oppressors means that 'the potential for Jewish agency was restricted from the start and increasingly diminished over time'.¹⁶ Yet in Britain, where this balance of power was to some extent inverted, we find that Jews had a far wider and more palatable range

of options open to them, which they pursued to great effect, playing an active role in shaping fascism's path of development.

This may, on the one hand, reinforce the idea that Anglo-Jewry is an 'oddity', set apart from the experiences of its continental peers. Yet, rather than detract from the importance of its history, this is surely a powerful argument in its favour. If the experiences of British Jews do not fit comfortably into wider paradigms, then it is important to understand what it is that made Britain, and its Jews, different. Alternatively, it may be the case that, as with the general study of fascism, the attention paid to Nazi Germany has obscured alternative Jewish interactions with fascism elsewhere, with Britain fitting into a broader story of Jewish resistance to the European radical right, particularly before 1939.

Finally, an understanding of Jewish interactions with interwar fascism can, it is hoped, contribute to the wider question of how minorities respond to organized political prejudice directed against them. This is an issue not only of historical interest but also, given the continued existence – and recent renewed prominence – of the ultranationalist, xenophobic radical right, one with contemporary resonance. The circumstances of interwar Britain's Jews – a small community, widely perceived as alien to and even incompatible with the native culture, facing relatively pervasive suspicion and hostility – are characteristic of many minority groups across different time periods and national contexts. The emergence of a political movement that harnessed such prejudices and advocated placing restrictions upon, or even completely removing, certain minorities is also an experience far from unique to Jews. And here Britain provides a more widely applicable historical model than, say, Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, given that the modern radical right is, in virtually all European countries, still a small, fringe force, whose impact is felt more through stirring public disorder and ethnic tensions than in terms of any formal political power.

Yet, while it is hoped that the present work can in some way contribute to this range of fields – and reference will be made throughout to the relevant literature – the study itself will focus relatively narrowly on the use of antisemitism by Britain's interwar fascists – in particular the BUF – and on the ways in which the country's Jews responded. As such, it is worth, to provide some context for what is come, offering a brief overview of the history of Britain's fascists and their opponents during the relevant period, how this history has been interpreted by scholars, and in what ways this study will augment and challenge the existing scholarship.

The outlines below are divided into two parts – on fascist antisemitism and Jewish responses – that replicate the division made in the rest of the book. This structure has been chosen, in part, for reasons of clarity, as well as because of the different methodological approaches taken for each of the two subjects under consideration. But it also reflects a central aspect of this study's findings, which is to reject the widely held idea that Jewish actions were responsible for the fascists' adoption of antisemitism. Instead, it will be demonstrated that the latter developed independently of the former, and as such merits consideration in its own right. That is not to say, however, that the two sides were completely disconnected. There were a number of ways in which they intersected with one another, and these points of contact will be made clear throughout.

The BUF and antisemitism

As suggested above, assessments of the impact made by the BUF on British society usually place it somewhere between an irrelevance and an inconvenience. With relatively low membership for most of its existence, defeat in the few elections it contested and an extremely limited contribution to mainstream political and intellectual discourse, the party's presence was felt chiefly through the public-order problems it provoked. Richard Thurlow, a leading historian of British fascism, accepts that the BUF was of 'only marginal significance to British politics', a 'nuisance' at worst.¹⁷ Yet this has not prevented a profusion of work appearing since serious academic research into British fascism began in the 1960s, with the field now encompassing comprehensive surveys (from Colin Cross' early work, *The Fascists in Britain*, through to more recent efforts, such as Thurlow's *Fascism in Britain* and Thomas Linehan's *British Fascism*),¹⁸ portraits of individuals' figures (most notably Robert Skidelsky's biography of Mosley)¹⁹ and studies of local Blackshirt activity.²⁰

A particularly interesting avenue of inquiry has been the party's ideology. Mosley, an accomplished thinker and previously a rising star in both the Conservative and Labour Parties, produced a programme that, Thurlow argues, was 'intellectually the most coherent and rational of all the fascist parties in Europe', representing a sophisticated synthesis of 'English radical economics, fascist politics and German idealist philosophy'.²¹ Scholars of fascism concur, with Paxton observing that 'Mosley probably had the greatest intellectual gifts... of all the fascist chiefs', making his party 'one of the most interesting [fascist] failures' of the interwar period. Even Payne admits that the BUF possessed an 'elaborate', 'decidedly modernist' programme, combining complex economic theory and concepts of 'scientific production' with vitalist and Shavian philosophical influences.²²

Fascism has also been used as a prism through which to view other aspects of British politics and society. Martin Pugh and Richard Griffiths, for example, have explored the sympathy felt towards fascism by some on the conventional political right, describing the 'flourishing traffic in ideas and personnel' between the two sides. This, Pugh argues, dispels the 'comforting and widely held view' that British fascism was destined to fail, and instead reveals the influence it had on interwar politics.²³ As his words suggest, others – Mike Cronin being one example – have used British fascism's failings to argue for a resistance to extremism allegedly inherent to Britain's political character.²⁴ Meanwhile Griffin, as we have seen, employs the British case as an illustration of the difficulties fascism faces in achieving power without a specific set of favourable circumstances.²⁵

Although scholars differ on many of the details, there is broad agreement on the general path of the BUF's history.²⁶ Founded in late 1932, following the collapse of Mosley's proto-fascist New Party,²⁷ it initially took Italian Fascism as its chief inspiration (and received discreet funding from Benito Mussolini). The party adopted many of the typical trappings of fascism: uniforms, processions, a quasi-military structure and ethos, an emphasis on physical training and youth, and absolute dedication to the cause and to 'the Leader', as Mosley styled himself.

Additionally, as intimated above, its ideology was quintessentially fascist, predicated on a gloomy diagnosis of the economic, social, cultural and political decay supposedly afflicting Britain, and proposing a revolutionary remedy to purge the influences seen to be responsible for this state of affairs, thereby inaugurating a reborn and revitalized nation populated by a 'new fascist man'. In terms of the party's programme, this was manifested in a balance between negative aspects – opposition to communism, international finance, the 'Old Gang' of political parties and various other forces allegedly detrimental to national wellbeing – and a more positive image of the Britain Mosley promised to (re)create. Seeking to place itself above the traditional division between political right and left, the BUF from the start laid out a detailed picture of the corporatist political and economic system it proposed to establish and the ways in which this would transform the British economy through modern, scientific methods; ameliorate industrial relations by balancing the interests of employers, employees and consumers; and improve the lot of domestic businesses and workers by insulating the British market from deleterious international influences.²⁸

While asserting that his followers would be prepared to meet with force any revolutionary threat from the far left, Mosley always expressed his preference for a lawful, electoral path to power. This necessitated the cultivation of a respectable image, meaning that the more disreputable aspects of Italian and German fascism – particularly violence and antisemitism – were initially suppressed. Violence, where it did take place, was usually 'defensive' in nature (though carried out with relish by many Blackshirts, particularly members of the specially trained 'defence force').²⁹ And while many within the party harboured, and often openly articulated, negative sentiment towards Jews, antisemitism was consistently repudiated in official pronouncements during the party's early days.

These aspirations to enter the political mainstream were boosted in early 1934, when the press magnate Lord Rothermere – proprietor of, among other titles, the *Daily Mail*, one of Britain's most widely circulated newspapers – threw his support behind the BUF. Already attracting considerable interest, the party now grew even more rapidly. It reached a peak membership of around 50,000 in 1934, with support drawn largely from the working class and unemployed, veterans of the Great War and middle-class youths.³⁰ (As a frame of reference, the British Fascists (BF), the most prominent fascist organization of the 1920s, briefly had perhaps a few thousand members at their peak, while during the 1930s membership of the Communist Party ranged between 2,500 and 18,000.)³¹ The Blackshirts also had notable success in attracting female members, who made up an estimated 25 per cent of support.³²

Over the summer and autumn of 1934, however, the BUF suffered a dramatic reversal of fortunes. A wave of organized anti-fascist disruption at its events was met with a violent response from Mosley's stewards, most conspicuously at the Olympia Hall meeting of June 1934. This, along with a concurrent escalation of Nazi brutality in Germany, irrevocably tarnished fascism's image in Britain, driving away the majority of the BUF's more respectable supporters, including Rothermere. Meanwhile, with Britain's economy beginning to recover from the Great Depression,³³ Mosley's economic policies, the centrepiece of his programme, held progressively less relevance

and appeal. As a result, his party entered a period of instability and decline, with membership falling as low as 5,000 in 1935.³⁴

A further cause of the BUF's growing disrepute was its increasingly explicit hostility towards Jews. This culminated in the formal 'adoption' of antisemitism in autumn 1934, justified by Mosley on the grounds that Jews had been guilty of attacking his party. It quickly became apparent that this feature of propaganda was proving popular in areas with traditions of tension between Jewish immigrants and other communities. This was particularly the case in London's East End, an economically deprived area that housed the country's largest concentration of Jews. From late 1935, the BUF began to focus its efforts there, mounting an intensive campaign of street-corner meetings, marches and propaganda drives, its activity dominated by a coarse and vicious antisemitism.³⁵ This inspired a hostile response from anti-fascists, whose ranks were swelled by large numbers of Jews, leading to a worsening cycle of violence between the Blackshirts and their opponents. Matters came to a head at the famous 'Battle of Cable Street' in October 1936, where a crowd of 100,000 or more demonstrators forcibly prevented a column of Blackshirts headed by Mosley from marching through the streets of east London.

Although successful in attracting support in a narrow range of localities, the BUF largely collapsed as a national force during this period. As a consequence, it also struggled financially, a problem that was exacerbated by Mussolini's decision to cut back his subsidies as Mosley drifted closer to the Nazis.³⁶ This lack of funds, as well as the party's failure to win a single seat at local elections in 1937, forced Mosley to implement drastic cutbacks in personnel and administrative costs, leading to the departure of many leading members.

Subsequently, the BUF re-orientated away from the East End and attempted to return to the national stage. In particular it aimed to exploit public concern over events in Europe, with Mosley launching a passionate crusade to avert the impending war with Germany and to prevent the arrival of (mostly Jewish) refugees from central Europe.³⁷ This helped spark a revival of interest in his party, with membership estimated to have grown to perhaps 20,000 in 1939.³⁸ After the outbreak of war, suspicions over where the allegiance of British fascists lay led, in 1940, to the forcible dissolution of the BUF by the government and the internment of many of its members, including Mosley.

No scholar disputes that antisemitism played a significant role in the above developments. Yet, as we will see in the following chapter, it has in many regards been relegated to a secondary position within the historiography, treated as an artificial appendage to the BUF's programme, rather than an organic element of it. Consequently, while various facets of the party's history – its ideology, membership, structure, activity, the opposition it aroused and so on – have been examined in their own right, antisemitism tends to be discussed almost entirely in terms of its relationship to these issues.

The only monograph devoted specifically to this subject – W.F. Mandle's *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* – was written four decades ago.³⁹ Given the wealth of primary material and secondary research that has since emerged, his analysis shows its age. More recent accounts tend to spend little time examining the antisemitism itself: the ways in which it was expressed, the beliefs that underlay it and

its relationship to the BUF's wider programme. Instead, they focus on the reasons for and consequences of its use – certainly important issues, but indicative of the idea that antisemitism is simply a prism through which to examine other aspects of BUF history. Tellingly, equal or greater attention is often paid to the anti-Jewish output of other organizations on interwar Britain's radical-right fringe, despite their minuscule size and complete lack of impact, even in comparison to the BUF. This, it seems, is because antisemitism is regarded as being a more authentic component of their ideology than it was of the BUF's.⁴⁰

Part One of this study aims to contest such a notion and to advance this aspect of the scholarship on British fascism. First, through a combination of a quantitative survey of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the BUF press and more traditional analysis of primary sources, a comprehensive picture of the evolving use of antisemitism over the party's entire existence will be drawn. This will challenge the standard narrative in a number of ways, demonstrating, above all, that the BUF's anti-Jewish outlook was absolutely evident throughout its history, including the periods before its formal 'adoption' in autumn 1934 and after the turn away from the East End in 1937. Indeed, it will be shown that the crude antisemitism of the East End campaign in 1936–7 – which has attracted the most historical attention – was very much an interruption to the longer-term development of a distinctive, consistent and sophisticated anti-Jewish position, one that was closely integrated across the party's wider programme.

This understanding will then be used to explore the relationship between the BUF's antisemitism and its ideology, revealing that the former was always an authentic and fundamental aspect of the latter, thereby refuting any suggestion that outside influences, such as Jewish anti-fascism, played a part in compelling the party to oppose Jews. This will be shown to be symptomatic of fascism's necessary rejection of out-groups deemed incompatible with its idealized vision of a pure nation; but, equally, we will also see that the BUF's antisemitism was not at all imitative of other fascist movements, instead representing a synthesis – and, it will be argued, a 'fascistization' – of various native traditions of anti-Jewish thought. Throughout the foregoing, the conspicuous presence of Mosley will be observed, and in Chapter 4 his dominant role in the formulation and presentation of the BUF's anti-Jewish position will be explored, challenging the perception of him as a reluctant antisemite.

While these findings rest upon extensive primary research, it should be noted that – in contrast to the second part of the book, which will take advantage of much underused or completely new material – archival holdings pertaining to British fascism are well explored and, other than the occasional release of files by the National Archives, rarely produce completely novel sources. However, given the sheer volume of material available, examining certain parts of it more thoroughly than others have been able, approaching them from a different perspective or applying novel forms of analysis allows new understandings to emerge. Even three decades ago Colin Holmes admitted that his work on BUF antisemitism was not 'breaking into uncharted territory', but emphasized the continued value of 'rigorous and probing analysis of the evidence.' Fifteen years and a further deluge of research later, Kenneth Lunn warned that 'the notion that we no longer have anything to say about any particular aspect of

British fascism's history' simply because the available sources have been exhausted is a 'methodology long since discredited'.⁴¹

The National Archives remain the richest resource. The contents of its files relating to the BUF do, it should be noted, have a strong bias towards the issues that most interested the authorities – particularly public order and national security – and towards events in London. But this is, in fact, rather helpful for the present study. The police, Home Office and government regarded antisemitism as a key factor in fascist-related disorder and were concerned about links between British fascists and their German counterparts, with mutual opposition to Jews a cornerstone of this relationship. Moreover, a disproportionate amount of BUF activity, and particularly its anti-Jewish campaigning, took place in London.

The BUF itself left behind a wealth of published material, now available at a variety of archives and libraries: books, pamphlets and leaflets; an academic-style journal, *Fascist Quarterly* (FQ); and three national newspapers, *Blackshirt*, *Action* and *Fascist Week* (FW). It is these that will form the basis of the analysis of the party's anti-Jewish discourse, with the quantitative study of its newspapers, contained in Chapter 2, offering a good example of how applying fresh methodological approaches to well-used sources can tease out new insights. Relatively little, however, remains in terms of the BUF's internal records (or at least little that is available to scholars), but much of what does is held at the Universities of Birmingham and Sheffield. In particular, Mosley's papers, housed at Birmingham, demonstrate the efficacy of thoroughly reviewing previously examined sources. They provide, in the form of handwritten notes ignored by earlier researchers, unique evidence of Mosley's personal thoughts on the use of antisemitism, which will be used to support a fresh understanding of his involvement in this aspect of policy.

Anti-fascism and Anglo-Jewry

Despite far outnumbering their opponents, and proving extremely successful in subduing them, Britain's anti-fascists have received significantly less historical attention. In part, this reflects the fact that they were not a single, cohesive force, but rather a variegated and evolving collection of groups and individuals who opposed fascism for varying reasons and in different ways, often completely uncoordinated – and at times even in conflict – with one another. Even defining whom to place within this category has proved divisive. Many choose to focus primarily on those who confronted the fascists directly, an approach that has characterized various local histories, which detail efforts to physically oppose the Blackshirts in places as diverse as Oxford, Aberdeen and the Medway Towns of Kent.⁴² These forms of activity often had a strongly political, and in particular left-wing, flavour.

Copsey, who has produced the most authoritative and rigorous work on the subject, criticizes accounts that deal only with this type of 'hostile activism'. Instead, he proposes a more 'pluralistic' approach, one that also incorporates 'liberal' (i.e. non-confrontational) and even 'passive' (i.e. non-active) anti-fascism. This allows for a far broader and more textured picture of the forces that were arrayed against British

fascism. His most recent volume, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, co-edited with Andrzej Olechnowicz, includes contributions on the Labour, Conservative and Communist Parties, the press, émigré intellectuals, women, Christians and the British state.⁴³

Copsey acknowledges, however, that holes remain in the research, and that 'much more needs to be said about the historic and contemporary complexities of anti-fascism'.⁴⁴ One group that has, in particular, been neglected in his work are Britain's Jews. In *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, Jewish individuals appear from time to time, but only briefly, and as Conservative MPs, Labour councillors, intellectuals and so on, rather than as Jews.⁴⁵ Copsey's earlier survey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, provides greater coverage of Jewish involvement; yet, despite his calls for a wider definition of anti-fascism, he is himself guilty of focusing almost exclusively on left-wing, activist forms of Jewish opposition to the BUF.⁴⁶

This has been the case elsewhere, too. Research on the BUF has, understandably, concentrated on the types of Jewish activity that most directly impinged on the party, which tends to mean disruptive and confrontational anti-fascism. More surprisingly, Anglo-Jewish historians have also presented a rather one-sided account. Their primary interest has been the vigorous and assertive response to fascism among some Jews – often young, working class and of recent immigrant stock – in the East End and Manchester. These individuals were active and influential participants in a coalition of groups, centred around the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), that was responsible for the most visible opposition to the BUF. Their story is an important one, yet its domination of the historical narrative has come at the expense of other forms of Jewish activity. Where these are acknowledged, it is usually in the form of criticism of the Anglo-Jewish communal leadership for allegedly failing to take seriously the fascist threat and, consequently, pursuing only a half-hearted and ineffective defence policy. Additionally, accounts tend to focus on the periods when disruptive anti-fascism was at its most intense, 1934 and 1936–7, to the neglect of important developments before, after and between (a similar, and related, temporal bias has also characterized the study of BUF antisemitism).⁴⁷

Part Two of this book attempts to address some of these deficiencies, and to expand and enhance our understanding of Jewish anti-fascism, by looking beyond the most visible and direct forms of activity. Adopting a more traditional, linear structure than the first half of the study, it will comprise a broadly chronological account – divided into three periods, each representing a separate stage of development – of the ways in which different elements of the Jewish community perceived and reacted to the emergence of the BUF and other groups on the domestic radical right, and tracing the ways these responses evolved over time and interacted with one another, as well as with non-Jewish forms of opposition. By encompassing a much wider range of responses than previous studies, and over a longer period of time, a far more textured picture of Jewish anti-fascism will emerge than the standard portrayals of an antithetical division between working-class activists and passive elites. In particular, perceptions of the attitude and actions of the latter group will be revised, revealing far greater urgency and activity from the Jewish leadership than the prevalent narrative allows. Throughout, the prominent and decisive role Jews played at all levels of Britain's highly successful anti-fascist movement will be revealed.

These findings will be used to reflect more widely upon issues of communal dynamics and identity. The 1930s were a time of enormous upheaval for Anglo-Jewry, as growing tension over the balance of power within a community whose complexion had changed rapidly over preceding decades came to a head. The threat of fascism – both at home and abroad – and the heated debate it provoked among Jews over how best to respond are traditionally portrayed as fitting neatly into this wider process of communal reform, with an increasingly assertive immigrant community forcefully challenging the authority of the traditional anglicized elites, who were failing to properly represent the interests of Anglo-Jewry in its entirety. Yet, while it is true that the emergence of the BUF exposed pre-existing divisions within Anglo-Jewry, it will be shown that, over time, there developed a cohesive Jewish response, with broad agreement on the forms that communal defence should take and the fact that it should be coordinated by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the community's official representative body. This, in turn, played a part in smoothing an evolution – rather than radical transformation – towards a leadership that better embodied the community it served.

We will also see how these developments encouraged reflection by Jews on their position within British society. The BUF's antisemitism acted as a powerful reminder that Jews continued to be regarded as alien by a substantial section of the British population, while the worsening fate of Jews at the hands of fascists elsewhere in Europe put into perspective some of the disputes that had previously divided Anglo-Jewry's disparate elements, and emphasized the common interests that they shared. Equally, however, Jews were by and large well integrated into their surrounding society, and we find that their approaches to fascism were strongly informed by a sense of attachment to Britain. How Jews negotiated the balance between their various identities, and the reciprocal relationship between this process and Jewish defence activity, will be explored.

The account presented in Part Two relies in large part on the exploitation of sources previously unavailable to or neglected by scholars, and therefore will contain a great deal of material that has never before appeared in print. In particular, the defence archive of the Board of Deputies, housed separately from its main collections, contains a wealth of material that, perhaps as a result of its relative inaccessibility,⁴⁸ has barely been touched. As well as offering an invaluable insight into the attitude and actions of the Jewish communal leadership – much of which was unpublicized at the time and has remained hidden since – it also covers a broad range of other Jewish groups and individuals with whom the Board, as Anglo-Jewry's representative body, was in contact or whose activity it closely monitored. Additionally, the Board's defence committee collected more comprehensive intelligence on British fascism than any institution other than the British state itself (indeed, the authorities themselves often sought information from the Board). Its archives, therefore, provide extensive details of fascist activity, including unique glances into the internal workings of various radical-right organizations from the Board's network of informants.

Two further sources that have received relatively little attention are the large (but uncatalogued) collection of material on the British radical right gathered by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, housed at University College London, and the Anglo-Jewish

archives held by the Parkes Institute at Southampton University. From the latter, this study has made particular use of the private papers of Neville Laski, the president of the Board for most of the 1930s; his successor, Selig Brodetsky; Robert Waley Cohen, a communal luminary whose collection is a recent addition to the Institute's holdings; and the eponymous James Parkes himself, a clergyman and scholar who maintained close contact with various Jewish groups interested in combating fascism and antisemitism. Together, these provide further details of the discussions that took place between a variety of actors, both inside and outside the Jewish community, and the activity that consequently arose.

On the anti-fascist activity of working-class and left-leaning Jews, the People's History Museum and Working Class Movement Library, both in Manchester, are of particular value, while the same city's Jewish Museum possesses a comprehensive collection of written and oral-history material. Hull University Library also holds useful sources in this regard, particularly the archives of the National Council of Civil Liberties (known today as the pressure group Liberty). Two contemporary personal collections – those of Lazar Zaidman, a prominent figure in the CPGB and the Workers' Circle friendly society, and David Spector, a leading member of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, housed at Sheffield University and the Wiener Library, respectively – provide further repositories of information. Finally, although far from being underused, the back catalogue of the *Jewish Chronicle* (*JC*), Anglo-Jewry's main newspaper, is an indispensable source on activity and opinion across the entire spectrum of Anglo-Jewry, as well as on the development of domestic fascism, which the *JC* closely monitored.

