

5-2012

"Not Italian or German, but British in Character": J. F. C. Fuller and the Fascist Movement in Britain

Mason W. Watson
College of William and Mary

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“NOT ITALIAN OR GERMAN, BUT BRITISH IN CHARACTER”:
J. F. C. FULLER AND THE FASCIST MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

Mason W. Watson

Accepted for _____

_____ Director

Williamsburg, VA
May 8, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this thesis would never have been possible without the contributions of numerous individuals whose patient and diligent assistance was of immeasurable value to me. I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Kathrin Levitan, for her consistent guidance and help which sustained my research and writing through many crises. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Professors Frederick Corney of the History Department and Kathrin Seidl-Gomez of the Modern Languages and Literatures Department, for their tolerance and insight. I am also greatly thankful for the support of my friends and family. In particular, I would like to thank my parents, Joan Allard and Ralph Williams, for their love and much-needed advice. I would also like to thank Mary Dupuis, whose love and support helped to preserve my sanity even as she experienced the thesis writing process along with me.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Looking back on his career, John Frederick Charles Fuller reflected that the years between 1933 and 1939 were “probably the most interesting years of my life.”¹ His description of his activities during that period deserves to be quoted in full:

I travelled a good deal in Europe, because I was convinced that its entire political and social foundations were in the melting-pot; that new systems were boiling up, and that it was of the utmost importance to discover their trend. I met Hitler first in December, 1934, and was the sole foreign journalist at his first maneuvres in the following year; subsequently I met him some half a dozen times, and was one of the two Englishmen who attended his 50th birthday celebrations in 1939 – a most interesting occasion. In 1935-36, for some three months, I was the Daily Mail war correspondent in the Italo-Abyssinian War, and on my way out had a private interview in Rome with Mussolini. As a free-lance journalist I went to Spain three times during the Civil War, and met Franco on one occasion. During this period I contacted many of the leading German, Italian and Spanish generals and politicians – Blomberg, Fritch, Beck, Badoglio, de Bono, Chiano, Moscardo, Quipo de Llano, etc., etc.²

Fuller’s political and journalistic activities during the 1930s involved him closely in many of the most significant events of his lifetime. He witnessed the two smaller European conflicts that preceded the outbreak of the Second World War firsthand. He met the dictators of Italy, Germany and Nationalist Spain, as well as many of their foremost military commanders. He was a thoughtful observer of the European “melting-pot,” which was then in the process of producing what he euphemistically termed “new systems.” But Fuller was not a purely objective or dispassionate follower of developing trends, as his self-justificatory account suggests. Throughout much of the decade he was a self-styled fascist, as well as an influential member of Britain’s foremost fascist party. His curiosity about the “new systems” emerging abroad was inspired by sympathy for Europe’s fascist and National Socialist regimes. He believed that the “melting pot” in

¹ J. F. C. Fuller to William Sloane, April 18, 1962, box 3, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

² Ibid.

which Europe's "entire political and social foundations" were submerged heralded the emergence of a new totalitarian political order.

In spite of Fuller's own claims about the importance and interest of his activities during the 1930s, his significance as a historical figure rests mainly on his contributions to the development of military thought. Brian Holden Reid classed J. F. C. Fuller – alongside his friend and collaborator, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart – as Britain's sole military theorist of the "first water."³ Born in 1878, Fuller spent his childhood in a respectable bourgeois atmosphere, "the undistinguished child of an Anglican clergyman."⁴ He displayed a marked predilection for intellectualism and autodidacticism from a young age, preferring reading to other pursuits.⁵ At the age of nineteen he was sent into the British Army "on the strength of a family whim."⁶ He fought as an infantry officer in South Africa during the Boer War, spending a period of time as the commander of ragtag police force tasked with suppressing Boer guerrilla activity in a wide region of the Veldt.⁷ During lulls in the fighting, Fuller found the time to read some 200 books on subjects ranging from history to philosophy and religion.⁸ It was at this time that he began to develop his personal philosophy, which was heavily influenced by intellectual currents that were well outside the Victorian mainstream.⁹ He lost his religious faith and developed a strong interest in Darwinism evolution, reading works by a wide variety of

³ Brian Holden Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought: Debates with Fuller and Liddell Hart* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 170.

⁴ Azar Gat, *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 13.

⁵ Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 9.

⁶ Brian Holden Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 8.

⁷ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 12-16.

⁸ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 12-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

authors including Carlyle, Heraclitus and Kant.¹⁰ As Brian Holden Reid explained in his study of Fuller's military thought, "...at the beginning of his career, Fuller identified himself with a major intellectual current, and one that owed little to the democratic, empirical English tradition."¹¹

While stationed in India after the end of the Boer War, Fuller's intellectual interests broadened and became increasingly esoteric. In 1906, he entered a contest to write the best essay on the collected works of Aleister Crowley.¹² Fuller's entry won – and his essay ultimately provided the basis for his first book, *The Star in the West*.¹³ Fuller became a close associate of Aleister Crowley for a period of about five years, writing for the occult journal *The Equinox*. Even after breaking off from Crowley's circle in 1911, Fuller retained a lively interest in the mystical and the occult, writing a number of books on subjects such as Yoga and Kabbalah, which form an interesting contrast alongside his military and political works. Fuller claimed that it was only around this time that he developed a serious interest in military affairs. He applied and was accepted to the Staff College at Camberly in 1913, although his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁴ He spent the first part of the war in relatively undistinguished positions, only achieving his breakthrough when he was appointed as a staff officer to the nascent Tank Corps in December 1916.¹⁵ After that point, Fuller became closely involved in efforts to develop effective mechanized tactics. He was quickly convinced that the tank offered the best means by which the horrendous

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Ibid., 14.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 29-31.

¹⁵ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 40.

bloodshed on the western front might be reduced or eliminated altogether. His arguments in favor of mechanization helped to win over official support to the Tank Corps, which subsequently played an important role in a number of British offensives – most dramatically in the battles of Cambrai (1917) and Amiens (1918), both of which Fuller helped to plan.¹⁶ Towards the end of the war, Fuller produced perhaps his most well-known contribution to military thought, the outline of a plan for a tank offensive commonly known as “Plan 1919.” In that work, which Reid described as “the most famous unused plan in military history,”¹⁷ Fuller explained how a hypothetical high speed tank could be used to achieve a large-scale breakthrough in the German lines. After the initial breakthrough, armored spearheads would seek out and destroy the command apparatus of the German army far behind the trenches. Without effective leadership, Fuller reasoned, the German armies would collapse. The British, French and American armies could advance on a wide front, possibly ending the war in a single blow.¹⁸

While the armistice in 1918 ensured that “Plan 1919” would never be attempted, the ideas that the plan expressed formed the basis for much of Fuller’s subsequent military thought. After the war, Fuller became one of the foremost proponents of the mechanization of the British Army. Together with Liddell Hart, he campaigned actively in favor of the preservation and expansion of the Tank Corps. The bloodshed of 1914-1918 left him convinced that the errors of trench warfare should never be repeated. He was certain that mechanization – the application of modern technology to war – provided the surest guarantee against a future descent into stalemate and attrition. Fuller published a number of books in which he elucidated his theory of warfare. His ideas were for the

¹⁶ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 41-60.

¹⁷ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-55.

most part better received by the younger officers of the British Army – and by members of foreign militaries – than by the senior military leadership that actually had the power to put them into effect. His in-depth study of military theory in fact received official disapproval. Future Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Archibald Montgomery-Massingbird, refused to even read one of Fuller’s books, declaring to Liddell Hart that “it would only annoy me!”¹⁹ Fuller was briefly given a truly golden opportunity to shape the development of Britain’s armored forces when he was offered command of the Experiment Force at Tidworth in 1927.²⁰ He accepted the position, but instantly objected to the fact that he was to be given command of several infantry units in addition to the Experimental Force itself – something he considered to be an unnecessary and burdensome distraction. He ultimately went so far as to offer his resignation over the matter. Although his resignation was refused, command of the Experimental Force passed to another officer.²¹ Fuller was never offered a position of comparable significance again. He was not given any employment at all after 1931 and was finally placed on the retired list in December 1933. The reforms that he had championed for over a decade were still far from being realized.

Bitter over the British Army’s failure to give him suitable appointment, Fuller had no further interest in attempting to change the military from the inside:

As far as I am concerned [he wrote] they may keep their appointments. I do not seek them; what I should like is some civil employment, and as such, in the present chaotic state of the world, are hard to come by, I have fallen back on the pen and intend to use it whether the W.O. like it or not. What I write is neither scandalous or libelous or even personal, and an officer on half-pay can write what he likes. I see no reason why I should discontinue doing so.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

²⁰ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 134.

²¹ Ibid., 134-141

²² J. F. C. Fuller to Thelma Fuller, September 1, 1933, box 2, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

He would indeed derive much of his income from “the pen” for the remainder of his life. His established body of published work allowed him to transition fairly easily into a career in journalism, which he immediately began to use as a platform to advance his military views. He also drifted into political activism, becoming a member of the New Britain Group, a minor organization which was dedicated to political and philosophical debate and which published its own periodical.²³ Already, his political writing was distinctly fascist in tone; he expressed strong admiration for the European fascist states, which seemed to compare very favorably to Britain. In the summer of 1934, he took the fateful step of joining Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists. He would be associated with the BUF and with British fascism in general throughout the remainder of the decade.

J. F. C. Fuller’s participation in the British fascist movement has proved to be difficult to assess. He was undoubtedly a very prominent member of the BUF, ranking alongside other leadership figures such as Robert Forgan and John Beckett (both of them former MPs), and William Joyce (later infamous during the Second World War as “Lord Haw Haw”).²⁴ As Martin Pugh explained, Fuller became “a key figure in BUF organization as well as a parliamentary candidate.”²⁵ There is nevertheless considerable confusion concerning the precise nature of his role within the BUF, as well as the details of his political beliefs. Within the literature on British fascism and the BUF, he has been variously described as a violent extremist and as a moderate. On the one hand Thomas

²³ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 176.

²⁴ Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Penguin Press, 1972), 120.

²⁵ Martin Pugh, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts!": Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 166.

Linehan classed Fuller as one of the leaders of the “moderate” faction within the BUF, alongside the former conservative party agent F. M. Box.²⁶ On the other hand, D. S. Lewis argued in his book, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1939-81*, that Fuller was a “reactionary,” who neglected the more progressive elements of the BUF’s economic policy “in favor of railing against Jews, communists, democrats, and those who failed to take the necessary precautions to ensure the perpetuation of the British empire and Christian church.”²⁷ According to Richard Thurlow, Fuller was particularly notable within the BUF for his extreme anti-Semitism, being the author of one of the “most virulent of all anti-semitic diatribes in the inter-war period.”²⁸ Thomas Linehan asserted that Fuller’s fascist thought was thoroughly anti-modernist, and that he was opposed to urbanization and plagued with “disquiet about the machine and Fordist mass standardization...”²⁹ Patrick Glenn Zander, in his unpublished dissertation, “Right Modern: Technology, Nation, and Britain’s Extreme Right in the Interwar Period (1919-1940),” argued to the contrary that Fuller’s political activities were dominated by a “consistent, almost dogmatic campaign for technical modernization and rationality of approach.”³⁰ The picture of Fuller’s political activities and beliefs that emerges from these separate accounts is confused and inconsistent.

The confusion about Fuller’s political commitments during the 1930s extends into the literature on J. F. C. Fuller himself. Many students of Fuller’s military thought have downplayed his involvement in fascism, arguing that his controversial political stance

²⁶ Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 99-100, 103.

²⁷ D. S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 75.

²⁸ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987), 158.

²⁹ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 261.

³⁰ Patrick Glenn Zander, "Right Modern: Technology, Nation, and Britain’s Extreme Right in the Interwar Period (1919-1940)" (PhD diss., Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009), 252.

during the years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War was a passing fancy, the error of a largely apolitical army officer embittered by ill-treatment by his military superiors. Fuller's obituary in the *Times*, which described his "unhappy phase of flirtation with fascism, which seems to have been due to high-mindedness having taken a wrong turning," is typical.³¹ While more recent writing on Fuller has discussed his involvement with the BUF in more detail, his political activities during the 1930s nevertheless remain poorly understood. As Brian Holden Reid acknowledged in the foreword to his essay on "Fuller, Liddell Hart, and the Odyssey of British Fascism: Two Contrasting Attitudes to Political Tumult," the most comprehensive and up-to-date account of Fuller's participation in the BUF, "much more work remains to be done on Fuller's political affiliations."³²

There are several reasons why the details of Fuller's involvement in the BUF (and of his broader political views) have remained so elusive. Most notable among them is the surprising dearth of documentary evidence from that period of Fuller's life. Fuller claimed in 1962 that the bulk of his personal archives from before the Second World War had been destroyed by German bombs during the Blitz.³³ For whatever reason, there are far fewer letters and documents remaining from the years between 1933 and 1939 than from almost any other period of Fuller's life. This has naturally had negative consequences for historians studying his activities in the British fascist movement, and is most likely the explanation for the relative lack of emphasis that the years between 1933 and 1939 have received in studies of his life and thought. This is probably the reason, for

³¹ "Major-General J. F. C. Fuller: Historian and Influential Military Thinker," *The Times*, February 11, 1966.

³² Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 183.

³³ J. F. C. Fuller to William Sloane, April 18, 1962, box 3, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

example, that Brian Holden Reid devoted so little attention to Fuller's political views in the 1930s in his book, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*. Studies of fascism in Britain, on the other hand, have been hindered by the sheer breadth of Fuller's literary output. Between 1930 and 1940, Fuller wrote no fewer than sixteen books (he wrote over forty in total). He was also extremely active as a journalist, publishing numerous articles in a wide range of periodicals. The massive quantity of Fuller's writing has made accurate assessment of his ideas extremely difficult. Historians such as Thomas Linehan have been led to draw mistaken conclusions about Fuller's political beliefs simply because they erroneously regarded a small range of his works as presenting an accurate representation of his political thought in general – for example, this seems to have been the reason for Linehan's belief that Fuller was an anti-modernist: Linehan's discussion of Fuller drew from a limited selection of Fuller's works, particularly *The Dragon's Teeth* and *War and Western Civilization*, both of which were published prior to Fuller's association with British fascism. Claudia Baldoli was led to form almost the precisely wrong conclusion about Fuller's attitude towards Italian fascism – that Fuller was an extreme Italophile – for the same reason.³⁴

This is intended to help to resolve the various misunderstandings regarding J. F. C. Fuller's role in the British Union of Fascists by providing a comprehensive account of his political activities and thought between the years 1934 and 1939. This has been made possibly partly by Nicholas Mosley's decision to donate his father's personal papers to Birmingham University. The personal archives of Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, include a number of letters and reports by J. F. C. Fuller, which

³⁴ Claudia Baldoli, "Anglo-Italian Solidarity? The Shift from Italophilia to Naziphilia in the BUF," in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 159.

help to fill in the details of his role within the BUF. I have also uncovered several reports by Fuller, held along with his personal papers at Rutgers University, which have hitherto remained unknown. These provide essential information for understanding Fuller's activities as a war correspondent, which were central to the development of his political views during the 1930s. Altogether, this paper is intended to clarify Fuller's role within British fascism, and to provide a comprehensive account of his political thought during his "fascist decade." A clearer understanding of the political beliefs and activities of one of the foremost leaders of the BUF will in turn contribute to the general understanding of the British fascist movement as a whole.

J. F. C. Fuller was, according to his own description, a "full-blooded fascist." What this meant in practice was considerably complex. Fuller brought to the British Union of Fascists the same drive for reform and rationalization that he had exhibited throughout his career in the British Army. He did not accept fascist ideology uncritically. The ideas that were most important to his conception of fascism – the distrust of popular democracy, the belief in the need for a western spiritual revival and the conviction that society and government should be organized along the lines suggested by advancements in science and technology – were all derived from strong currents in his pre-fascist thought. Fuller regarded British fascism as a vehicle for bringing Britain into the modern age. By his association with Oswald Mosley, he hoped that he would be well positioned, if the BUF achieved power, to bring about the military reforms that he had long considered necessary. His peculiar conception of history, what he termed the "natural history of warfare," convinced him that political change inevitably followed technological progress – and that fascism, as the political expression appropriate to

modernity, was therefore fated to achieve success by historical necessity. Perhaps the overriding theme of Fuller's contributions to the BUF was his insistence that fascism in Britain assume a particularly *British* (as opposed to Italian or German) form. He attempted to guide the BUF throughout the 1930s towards policies that were consistent with what he considered to be fundamental British values, including a limited respect for social traditions and for parliamentary democracy. His experience of continental fascism gained during his employment as a war correspondent in the Italian-Ethiopian War and the Spanish Civil War – in addition to his frequent visits to Nazi Germany – reaffirmed his belief that fascism, as it was expressed on the European continent, was admirable but ultimately unsuitable to the character of the British people.

Fuller was nevertheless not purely an agent for moderation within the British fascist movement. From his earliest involvement in the BUF, he expressed support for a virulent form of anti-Semitism that gradually came to exercise a disproportionate influence over his political and military thought. Fuller was moreover strongly sympathetic towards Hitler and Nazi Germany. He believed that it was in Britain's interest to develop a strong friendship with Germany and – as conflict between Britain and Germany became increasingly likely towards the end of the decade – he became closely involved in a number of pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic causes. Fuller's enthusiastic support for Nazism and anti-Semitism make it clear that he was not simply a moderate influence on British fascism. While Fuller did argue in favor of moderating the BUF's message, he was also strongly associated with the most extreme elements of fascist thought and of the British pro-Nazi political fringe. His involvement with fascism therefore cannot be explained away as an essentially harmless error committed out of

political naïveté. Far from an eccentric misadventure, Fuller's involvement with British fascism in fact represented the consummation of the philosophy that he had developed over the course of his life. In the particular vision of fascist ideology to which he subscribed, Fuller believed that he had found the solution to the political, military and even spiritual problems that he had devoted much of his career to solving.

II. "A NEW WORLD CONCEPTION"

"Looking back over thirty-five years of service," J. F. C. Fuller wrote in 1936, "I feel that it is a duty to myself...to appraise what I accomplished, not during the war, for whatever was then done was of a transient nature; but, instead, during those years in which I became a wandering student, one who, leaving the beaten track of military thought, sought new ideas in directions but little explored."³⁵ Fuller's achievements in the Royal Tank Corps, including the drafting of "Plan 1919" and subsequent efforts to produce a theory of mechanized tactics, were in Fuller's own estimation relatively unimportant. The ultimate development of mechanization was inevitable, a product of underlying historical forces rather than individual personalities or even cataclysmic world events: "Had I never lived," Fuller admitted, "and even had there never been a World War, mechanization would have appeared among us in its own good time."³⁶ It was rather his later works, in which he appealed to a civilian rather than a military audience, "and more particularly to those who are politically minded," which Fuller imagined would

³⁵ J. F. C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: I. Nicholson and Watson, 1936), 452.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 453.

prove of lasting interest to posterity, for “in them is to be found anything which the future may judge to be of worth.”³⁷

The main themes of Fuller’s civilian-directed writing were, alongside military history, the broader questions of war and international politics. Fuller devoted increasing time and energy to these subjects throughout the latter half of the 1920s. By the early 1930s, abstract political and philosophical topics – as well as military history – had all but eclipsed Fuller’s earlier, narrow focus on mechanized tactics. His last book on tank tactics, a collection of lectures that he had given while serving as chief instructor at the Royal Staff College, was published in 1932 under the title *Lectures on FSR III*. By that time, Fuller’s body of work already indicated his shifting interest: a survey of British military history, *Imperial Defense, 1588-1914* (1926), was followed by the publication of *On Future Warfare* (1928); another military historical study, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (1929), was succeeded by an in-depth discussion of the problem of nationalism in India, *India in Revolt* (1931). By the middle of the 1930s, Fuller had abandoned the study of land tactics – the field in which he had made his reputation – almost entirely, returning to it in only a handful of articles over the course of the decade. He explained this shift in his intellectual output as a product of his intensive study of the strategic problems of the First World War. He had been led to turn his attention towards what he termed the “natural history of war” by the troubling world order created by Paris Peace Conference;³⁸ he sought to explain the origin of the 1914-1918 war and, proceeding from his observation that the First World War had emerged “out of a state of peacefulness,” he

³⁷ Ibid., 452.

³⁸ Ibid., 465.

concluded that the causes of war “must be sought in that state.”³⁹ As a result Fuller had effectively devoted himself to the construction of a general theory of international relations.

Even before his conversion to fascism, Fuller’s views on international affairs were characterized by a strongly-expressed abhorrence of democracy and mass rule. Described in his *Memoirs*, Fuller elevated antidemocratic sentiment to the level of a general historical and philosophical methodology.

My philosophy, such as it is, is founded upon skepticism, and...this skepticism helped me to realise that mass opinions are generally wrong, because mentally the masses are seldom less than a generation out of date. When, in 1918, they shouted, “Hang the Kaiser!” they were at least a thousand years out of date, and when, in 1919, they insisted upon the ruin of Germany they cast back to the mentality of the Thirty years War. There is, consequently, no magic in my system: if the masses yell “black!” I start with white and then examine it and ascertain whether it may not be grey or some other colour.⁴⁰

A strict adherence to this antidemocratic method underlay much of Fuller’s analysis of world history and international affairs. Distaste for mass politics led Fuller naturally to view emergent anti-democratic movements as a positive force for change. Years before he aligned overtly with Mosley and the BUF, Fuller had come to accept the totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany (and even the Soviet Union) as representative of a revolutionary new world historical force – one that could prove, among other things, the best instrument for the overthrow of the rotten democratic order.

In *The Dragon’s Teeth*, the first book which he dedicated almost entirely to the international questions in the abstract, Fuller condemned democracy as outdated and unsuited for the conditions of modern life. Predominating democratic political theories, according to Fuller, “remained as they were before the Industrial Revolution set in.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 464.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 465.

⁴¹ J. F. C. Fuller, *The Dragon’s Teeth: A Study of War and Peace* (London: Constable, 1932), 164.

Universal suffrage as it had developed in Western Europe and the United States was merely the latest expression of the spirit of the French Revolution, and was in consequence horribly out of date, for “since 1850...the structure of Western civilization [has] completely changed.”⁴² Mass politics, moreover – due to its unsuitability to the problems of industrial civilization – bore a large degree of responsibility for the tragedy of the First World War. The total mobilization of national populations in support of the war effort was just as much an expression of the ideals of the French Revolution as popular democracy: “As democracy, in the form of one man one vote, was the final expression of the French Revolution, so was that of the nation in arms, one man one musket, the military expression of this same upheaval.”⁴³ In effect, Fuller ascribed the unwillingness of allied political and military leaders to recognize the importance of technology and embrace the revolutionary (but untried, expensive and potentially risky) solutions Fuller espoused to their faith in the virtues of mass. The new military technology introduced during the war, particularly the tank and the airplane, represented for Fuller the empowerment of a mechanical elite – a return to the aristocratic warfare of the Middle Ages. Democratic states, because of their blinkered political traditions, could not bring themselves to embrace the new form of warfare wholeheartedly. The mass casualties of the First World War were therefore a perverse triumph of the democratic spirit: “In this war the horde unmasked itself, and proved itself a complete failure, as the implement of democracy the conscript army had won out.”⁴⁴

Just as the masses had bungled the war itself, they also criminally mismanaged the peace. Fuller regarded the Treaty of Versailles as a grave injustice, which proved to

⁴² Ibid., 256.

⁴³ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 270.

him conclusively that democracies are “totally incapable of terminating [wars] honorably.”⁴⁵ Influenced by the “hot breath of the mob,” Entente political leaders such as Lloyd George had dictated an iniquitous peace that had dire consequences for the defeated powers and for Europe as a whole.⁴⁶ The territorial settlement created after the war, undertaken to placate the masses, was grossly unjust and – for the balance of power – fundamentally destabilizing. Drawing upon the analysis of the Versailles Treaty put forward in John Maynard Keynes’s *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Fuller argued that the division of territory dictated at Versailles was unreasonable and that the economic costs for Germany were most likely fatal.⁴⁷ Far from ending war itself, the peace treaty had in fact made the world more violent and war more likely than ever before.⁴⁸ The League of Nations, as the instrument by which the postwar order was maintained, was worse than useless (although Fuller uncharacteristically upheld the League as a potential, if unlikely, avenue for the creation of a “European Economic Council” that would reconcile economic rivalries).⁴⁹ A new war could in fact prove beneficial, as any change in the *status quo* could lead to a more rational world order. While Fuller regarded a “second world war” as a poor means to set right the iniquities of the international order, he nevertheless looked favorably on a potential “war of rectification,” which promised to “rid the existing condition of peace of its economic diseases; to get back, as it were, to the last war, and to conclude it as it should have been concluded....”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 50-1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 53-56, 174.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 181.

Fuller's readiness to view any disruption of the world order – including even a second world war – as a potentially positive development led him naturally to sympathize with the various undemocratic regimes that emerged after the war, believing that they represented a revolutionary impulse that could contribute to a general revision of the world order. Fuller heralded the advent of a new revolutionary force that was equally opposed to popular rule and materialism, which he invariably associated with democracy.⁵¹ The European world “yearns for some vague heroism – honor to the virtuous, government by the most able, and victory by the most valiant.”⁵² The new faith was politically radical and fundamentally anti-democratic, “a revolt against the ignorance of massed multitudes.”⁵³ Interestingly, Fuller had not yet embraced fascism and was even prepared to consider communism alongside fascism and other ideologies as standard bearers of the new faith, which “in England and America...is called Communism; in Italy Fascism; in Turkey Despotism; in Russia Bolshevism; and in distant countries, like India and China, Nationalism – all vague terms for the rule of minorities, whatever may be their tone, shade or aspirations.” These were the ideologies that would remake the world and overturn the rotten international order established by the treaty of Versailles. “The ideals of the French Revolution,” Fuller announced, “are to-day in their last lap, and a still more potent revolution is sweeping over the face of the world.”⁵⁴

But although Fuller saw some virtue in communism and the Soviet Union, he was nevertheless unwilling to give Russia his unqualified support. While Fuller praised industrial development in Russia, which was “advancing whilst the rest of the world is

⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

falling back” – and even expressed qualified admiration for Lenin as a “man of courage,” the “Mahomet of the Industrial Revolution” – he still perceived the Soviet Union as a potential threat.⁵⁵ Russia was fundamentally “oriental,” and any Russian military success would therefore result in Europe being swept by “oriental” culture.⁵⁶ A war between Russia and Western Europe appeared to be inevitable.⁵⁷ Mussolini’s Italy, more than any other state, appeared to Fuller to exemplify the new, revolutionary faith. Whereas Fuller could only imagine Russia as a potential enemy, he speculated that Italy might serve as an ally for Britain in a future European war.⁵⁸ The Nazis in Germany were another matter. Hitler, according to Fuller, was “hailed as the German Mussolini – though far from being such.”⁵⁹ The Nazis most closely resembled the German communists as both parties, in Fuller’s estimation, shared important goals.⁶⁰

By the spring of 1934, Fuller’s opinion of German National Socialism had softened considerably. Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933 and subsequent transformation of German society earned Fuller’s whole-hearted admiration. Fuller cheered Hitler’s efforts to restore Germany’s economy and world power, which appeared decisive steps towards a general revision of the international order.⁶¹ Nazi Germany, together with Mussolini’s Italy (and even the Soviet Union) exemplified the revolutionary spirit of youth, dynamism and modernization. Fuller, who had little respect for any military officer over the age of fifty, very readily valorized youthful totalitarian leaders over their

⁵⁵ Ibid., 193, 189, 191.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁶¹ J. F. C. Fuller, *Empire Unity and Defense* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1934), 80.

older democratic counterparts.⁶² The totalitarian states were firmly “in the hands of youth,” led by the “new men of action,” and therefore compared very favorably with the “septuagenarians” and “old men of debate” of the established democratic powers.⁶³

But just as Fuller’s opinion of the Nazis had improved, his view of the League of Nations had appreciably worsened. Fuller no longer held out even “some small hope” of international reconciliation through an empowered League of Nations. He rather denounced the League in the harshest terms, calling it “the bastard of the League of Nations, a pink Jew-Bolshevik baby.”⁶⁴ The League was nothing less than the modern iteration of the Holy Alliance, which had sought to maintain the European order in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna.⁶⁵ Fuller expanded on his earlier critique of the peace settlement that followed the First World War, arguing that “it was not the war which wrecked Europe but the peace which followed it.”⁶⁶ The victors had attempted to use the League to accomplish the impossible goal of restoring the European order that had obtained prior to 1870. All they had achieved, however, was the Balkanization of Europe – the creation of a series of new states that were neither strategically nor economically viable.⁶⁷ Fuller reiterated his belief that war might prove an effective means to right the iniquities of Versailles, speculating that “a series of terrible explosions must occur until power is once again balanced on a rational plan.”⁶⁸ He left little doubt as to what would prove the agent of this explosive change. “A new world conception is rising at our feet, a world of mighty forces” Fuller warned. “Unless we as an Empire are

⁶² J. F. C. Fuller, *Generalship, its Diseases and their Cure; A Study of the Personal Factor in Command* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1933).

⁶³ Fuller, *Empire Unity and Defense*, 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 286-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

prepared to play our part in balancing these forces, which we cannot do unless we are united and intelligently led, they may submerge us.”⁶⁹ But with careful handling, Fuller was optimistic that this “new world conception” might prove a force for good.

They startle us, these Mussolinis, these Hitlers and these Lenins. We proclaim them foul; perhaps, less than a generation hence we shall call them divine, for to-day we are so blinded by self-conceit that we can see nothing clearly. They are the spirits of a trampled world, the world of our time-marking; they are powerful emanations possessed both by good and evil, consequently they are intensely human.⁷⁰

Within the space of a few months, Fuller had cast in his lot with the British Union of Fascists, apparently convinced that the place of “these Mussolinis, these Hitlers” within the historical pantheon was assured.

III. THE REORGANIZATION OF FASCISM

According to Oswald Mosley’s later recollection, J. F. C. Fuller applied to join the British Union of Fascists the day after the party’s disastrous rally at Olympia on June 7, 1934. The wording of Fuller’s letter was sufficiently memorable that the former fascist leader could recite it over forty years later: “This is the worst day of your life,” Fuller wrote. “You should always join a man in his worst moment.”⁷¹ The Olympia meeting had indeed been a fiasco for the BUF. According to the traditional narrative of the history of British fascism, it marked the end of the party’s brief flirtation with popular acceptance. It was the high water mark of press support for the BUF. Lord Rothermere’s influential newspaper empire had thrown its weight behind the Blackshirts earlier in 1934, publishing glowing accounts of Mosley’s speeches and praising the fascists as the saviors of Britain. Popular interest in the British Union of Fascists was sufficiently widespread

⁶⁹ Ibid., 83.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 289.

⁷¹ Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 185.

that a large section of British society, including many members of Britain's political and social elite – 13,000 people in total – turned out to witness Mosley's address at Olympia, one of the largest exhibition halls in London.⁷² As it happened, many anti-fascists were also in attendance. Almost as soon as Mosley began to speak, hecklers began to chant anti-fascist slogans: "Fascism Means Murder: Down with Mosley."⁷³ The BUF's stewards moved in to quell the disturbance, and fighting rapidly broke out in the aisles and corridors around the hall. Mosley's speech, which had been scheduled to last only an hour and a quarter, dragged on for over two hours due to the commotion.⁷⁴ Many influential attendees were appalled by the spectacle, giving lurid accounts to the press of the barbarity exhibited by the fascists.⁷⁵ Mosley's wave of popular support rapidly receded. By the end of July, Lord Rothermere had withdrawn his support and the BUF returned to political insignificance.⁷⁶

Yet for J. F. C. Fuller, who was not even six months into his retirement from the British Army, it appeared to be the perfect time to join the BUF. Mosley recognized a good thing when he saw one. A number of other attendees at Olympia were sufficiently impressed by the fascist demonstration to consider membership in Mosley's organization, but Fuller was, as Martin Pugh noted, "by far the most notable recruit."⁷⁷ Fuller met with Mosley five days later, receiving an appointment as Mosley's advisor on questions

⁷² Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 365.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁷⁴ Pugh, "*Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*", 156.

⁷⁵ Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 370-1.

⁷⁶ Pugh, "*Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*", 169.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

related to the military and defense.⁷⁸ In August, Fuller received a long letter from Mosley asking him to “draw up a clear-cut policy on the co-ordination of defense.”⁷⁹

Later in the summer, Fuller wrote to Mosley indicating that he regarded the decline in popular support for the BUF in the wake of Olympia as a blessing in disguise. “I’m glad the position between you + Rothermere has been cleared up,” he wrote. “The press is reliable, but as an instrument only, its danger is that it always aims at mastership and that its principles are regulated by dividends.”⁸⁰ British fascism would in fact be strengthened without the approval of the press, which was only capable of creating “great emotions + not great movements...”⁸¹ If the papers were opposed to the BUF, so much the better – the hostility of the press, according to Fuller, was “...as powerful an advertisement as its friendship; because, anyhow in the early days of a movement, it puts enthusiasts on their metal and keeps out the jelly-fish.”⁸² Indeed, as he explained, “...hostility gives quality whilst praise, at best, is of 24 hours duration in this age of ball-bangers and squeeze + kiss me girls.”⁸³

In the fall of 1934, Mosley decided to take advantage of Fuller’s military experience, asking him to compose a report on the organizational structure of the BUF.⁸⁴ Fuller eagerly set to work. The result was an eleven page report in which Fuller presented the essence of his vision for the fascist movement. “After two months’ close study at N. H. Q.,” Fuller wrote, “I am of opinion [sic] that the Movement cannot fail to succeed if

⁷⁸ Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 185.

⁷⁹ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 181.

⁸⁰ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, Summer 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Nicholas Mosley, *Beyond the Pale: Sir Oswald Mosley and family, 1933-1980* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983), 88-89.

certain radical changes are made in its organization and discipline.”⁸⁵ Failure to reorganize the movement and set it towards the accomplishment of a “clear cut and attainable object” would only result in disaster. “Unless this is done,” he declared, “I am of the opinion that the Movement will decline or will break up into hostile factions.”⁸⁶

The solution to the BUF’s organizational problem was a new orientation towards achieving power through constitutional means. This was to be accomplished by gaining a foothold in parliament.⁸⁷ This idea contrasted with the notion, not altogether unpopular within the BUF, that British fascism would come to power in violent, revolutionary circumstances – many in the BUF believed that the Blackshirts would serve as the spearhead of a counterrevolutionary backlash against a potential communist uprising.⁸⁸ This conception of the BUF’s purpose had a particular appeal for the movement’s younger members. Fuller regarded it as nonsense. The parliamentary route to power was less dramatic, but it was more certain. It was moreover far more likely to gain widespread support. The BUF’s radical orientation had the effect of alienating the greater part of the British people:

Of the little I have seen of propaganda [he wrote] it appears to me to be somewhat crude. It lacks art and common sense. In place of being persuasive it is aggressive. I agree that to start with a challenging spirit is necessary in order to wake people up; but now that the movement is on its feet... tactics must be fitted to circumstances.⁸⁹

The answer was to cut back the party’s most extreme propaganda, “diluting” fascism so as to make it acceptable to the conservative British temperament. “The pill must be well-coated; it is diplomacy and not compulsion which will win over the electorates. It should

⁸⁵ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on the Organization of the B.U.F.," October 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham, 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Pugh, "*Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*", 134-6.

⁸⁹ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on the Organization of the B.U.F.," October 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham, 2.

be remembered that for every one man and woman who applaud the words ‘revolution’ and ‘dictatorship’ there are ten who intensely dislike them.”⁹⁰ In practical terms, “coating the pill” meant diminishing the influence of the paramilitary elements in the party. Fuller recommended that the wearing of the militaristic blackshirt uniform be restricted. New members who could potentially embarrass the BUF would have to earn the privilege of wearing the uniform. He explained:

Though the wearing of the blackshirt appeals to young people, it must not be overlooked that this is an old country, very solid, stable and matter of fact. It is still instinctively a feudal country. The masses of the people will always listen to men and women of experience and importance, but they will seldom listen to boys and girls. They know that things must change, but their instincts are against violent changes. They reverence law and order and venerate the police as an instrument of government; but the idea that this position might be reversed and the government might become the instrument of the police or of the army appears to them to be ridiculous.⁹¹

If “blackshirtism” were allowed to continue, Fuller warned, the BUF’s activities could be reduced little more than bluster and provocation – something very far from what he called “philosophical” fascism.⁹² He displayed remarkable insight into the challenges facing the BUF, noting of the greater membership of the party that “it is not the Communists, Jews, etc., who are going to prevent the B.U.F. winning seats in the next election, it is themselves; not because they lack enthusiasm, but because they do not understand the conditions which exist in this country and, consequently their enthusiasm is misdirected.”⁹³ While “blackshirtism” might be an effective propaganda tactic in some nations, it would never work in Britain: “In a revolutionary country they would be right, but in a conservative country they are wrong. They do not see that – attack, attack, attack is a poor policy and a somewhat ridiculous one to assume in this country.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2-3.

⁹² Ibid., 2.

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3.

Fuller devoted the rest of his report to a detailed description of the specific changes in the command organization of the BUF that would be necessary to turn the movement into a viable political party. The general thrust of Fuller's comments, particularly about the organization of the BUF's national headquarters, appeared to be that he should be elevated into a position of leadership. He suggested that Mosley was unable to lead the whole of the organization alone with real efficiency, and proposed that the Leader become a member of a "triumvirate," which he called "the hidden dictatorship."⁹⁵ The two members of the triumvirate apart from Mosley would advise the Leader, who would have the final say in all decisions. "This trinity will represent the soul of the Movement," Fuller wrote. "Its existence should be kept secret."⁹⁶ Fuller also recommended that Mosley appoint a Second in Command, who would take over leadership of the BUF if anything happened to the Leader: "At present the very existence of the Movement is precarious, as it is literally a one-man show. If the Leader died or was for a long period incapacitated, the Movement would not only lose most of its financial support but would rapidly disintegrate."⁹⁷ That Fuller considered himself to be an ideal candidate either for the role of Second in Command or for membership in the triumvirate was clear from the letter that accompanied his report, in which he hinted very heavily that he wanted to be given a paid position in the BUF. If Mosley accepted his proposals, he wrote, "I am ready to assist anyhow for a period. I reckon it will take about 3 months to get the organization pulled together and 3 more before full results are seen."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁸ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, October 8, 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

Mosley was receptive to Fuller's recommendations. As Martin Pugh explained, "for all his platform braggadocio Mosley was sufficiently realistic, especially after 1934...to see the wisdom of Fuller's analysis."⁹⁹ True reorganization nevertheless would be delayed for over a year. In the meantime, Fuller aligned himself with F. M. Box, an influential member of the BUF and a former Conservative Party agent who shared his dedication to minimizing the radical elements within the fascist movement.¹⁰⁰ Box and Fuller became the leaders of a faction within the British Union of Fascists which hoped to moderate the paramilitary and anti-parliamentary elements in the party.¹⁰¹ They were opposed by a more radical faction, led by William Joyce and A. K. Chesterton (among others), who preferred an "uncompromising fascist propaganda campaign."¹⁰² Box and Fuller's efforts achieved some success in spite of this opposition. By January 1935, National Headquarters and the fascist local defense forces were abolished. Paramilitarism in general gave way in favor of a more traditional party organization.¹⁰³

In December, Fuller identified another aspect of the BUF that he believed required reform. Writing from Germany, Fuller reaffirmed the importance for the movement to pursue an electoral strategy: "the most important problem of the moment is to be in a position to establish outposts in parliament, that is a covering force for the winning of the elections after the next."¹⁰⁴ In the meantime, however, Fuller suggested that the BUF should focus on developing the intellectual content of fascism. "Quality depends on feeding the mind," he wrote. "Also mental superiority over the enemy

⁹⁹ Pugh, *"Hurrah for the Blackshirts!"*, 222.

¹⁰⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 99-100.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁴ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, December 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

stimulates enthusiasm + prestige.”¹⁰⁵ The cultivation of the “mental superiority” of the fascist movement became one of Fuller’s chief occupations over the following several months. January 1935 saw the publication of the first number of *Fascist Quarterly*, a BUF periodical that was consciously intended to elevate the level of British fascist discourse. Fuller contributed several articles to *Fascist Quarterly* during the early part of 1935, producing a notable essay on “Fascism and War,” in which he described the positive role he believed that a fascist government would play in bringing about military modernization and rationalization.

Fuller’s best known contribution to *Fascist Quarterly*, however, appeared in the first number in January 1935. In an article titled “The Cancer of Europe,” Fuller set out to describe the malign Jewish conspiracy that he believed had been in motion “for over a thousand years.”¹⁰⁶ “Having given Christianity to the world,” he wrote, “these strange people have never ceased in their endeavors to destroy Christian culture.”¹⁰⁷ He declared that the Jews desired to “dominate all other races...”¹⁰⁸ According to his view of history, “for over 1,000 years the Jews have been a world-wide power, a net of conspiracy and of race interests stretched over half the globe.”¹⁰⁹ This sort of anti-Semitism was not entirely new to Fuller’s writing. Even prior to his involvement with the BUF, for instance, he had denounced the League of Nations as a “pink Jew-Bolshevik baby.” The force and vehemence of Fuller’s expression of anti-Semitism in “The Cancer of Europe” was nevertheless a novel and disturbing development. Fuller blamed the Jews for many of the destructive revolutions in world history. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, for

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ J. F. C. Fuller, “The Cancer of Europe,” *Fascist Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1935): 66.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 70.

example “was almost entirely controlled and directed by Jews.”¹¹⁰ The League of Nations was also the product of a Jewish conspiracy, being an effort to undermine nationalism and to pave the way for the triumph of the Soviet Union.¹¹¹ The Jews were even responsible for general moral degradation, producing “economic and moral chaos.”¹¹² In order to create moral anarchy, Fuller explained, “immense and continuous demoralizing pressure is placed upon the masses, a thing easily accomplished to-day through the newspapers and the cinema, both of which are largely controlled by Jews...”¹¹³ He blamed nearly everything that he found distasteful in modern culture on the Jews, including jazz, “the latrine type of war story” (a category which included *All Quiet on the Western Front*) and the latest developments in artistic expression. “Art,” he declared, “in the form of painting and sculpture, has been lowered to the level of a gross animalism, ugliness being deified...”¹¹⁴

Fuller’s attacks on the Jews went well beyond the typical content of fascist anti-Semitism. He undertook to describe “Jewish magic,” which was centered around the Qabalah and the *Zohar*. “Through magic,” Fuller wrote, “not only were the Jews enabled to stimulate an intellectual revolt against the Church, but to gain control of the secular powers which were antagonistic to the Church...”¹¹⁵ The “magic” controlled by the Jews was practiced for centuries, giving rise to a wave of witchcraft and sorcery which spread throughout Europe.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, “Jewish magic” found a new expression in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 75.

¹¹² Ibid., 76.

¹¹³ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 76-7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 78-9.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 78.

psychoanalysis, the doctrines of which were “subversive and anti-Christian.”¹¹⁷ The variety of anti-Semitism to which Fuller subscribed was entirely unique – it was, as Linehan described it, a fusion of “extreme conspiratorial anti-semitism with medieval or magical anti-semitism.”¹¹⁸ Fuller’s radical anti-Semitic views provoked an immediate backlash, and he wrote a lengthy letter to the editor of *Fascist Quarterly* in response. He claimed absurdly that his criticism of the Jews in “The Cancer of Europe” had not been truly anti-Semitic. “As an Englishman I can object to the Sinn Fein movement without being proclaimed anti-Irish, or I can resent the crimes of Italian gangsters in Chicago without being classed as anti-Italian or anti-American; but once question the loyalty of Jewish revolutionaries and criminals, and one is forthwith proclaimed an anti-Semite, that is, a person so one-eyed and fanatical that he cannot recognize a good Jew from a bad one.”¹¹⁹ Proclaiming that he had “met not a few Jews whom I can full-heartedly respect,” he noted that he had “learned much from such writers as Maimonides, Avicbron and Spinoza...”¹²⁰ The rest of his letter consisted of quotations from what he termed “Jewish sources,” which he claimed supported the arguments that he had put forward in “The Cancer of Europe.” At the end of his letter, he even went so far as to argue that he had made a special effort to “sympathize with this ‘peculiar people’ as regard their persecutions and to credit them with virtues which most of these critics do not deign to hint at.”¹²¹ Fuller’s comments in “The Cancer of Europe” mark him out, along with William Joyce and A. K. Chesterton, as one of the BUF’s most extreme anti-Semites. Fuller’s paranoid conspiratorial anti-Semitism however was perhaps unique within the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 193.

¹¹⁹ J. F. C. Fuller, “General Fuller on the Jews,” *Fascist Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1935): 232.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹²¹ Ibid., 242.

British fascist movement for its emphasis on “magic” and mysticism in general – elements which were influenced by Fuller’s long-standing interest in the occult. Altogether, it is clear that Fuller was not wholly dedicated to moderating the message and tactics of the BUF. Although Fuller’s organizational proposals were intended to transform the British Union of Fascists into a more traditional political party – one that would be more suited to what he conceived to be the character of the British people – his attempt to promote the “mental superiority” of British fascism served only to exacerbate the fascist movement’s extremism and political (and social) irrelevance.

IV. THE ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN WAR

Fuller’s first year within the British Union of Fascists was unique as his efforts during that time were focused almost exclusively on the internal affairs (whether organizational or intellectual) of the party. Beginning in the summer of 1935, Fuller’s activities as a fascist became increasingly focused on international events – partly as a result of the escalating crisis in Abyssinia. After 1935, Fuller’s principle contribution to the BUF would be his interaction with and response to continental fascism. But although Fuller would only begin to travel abroad extensively beginning in October 1935, he devoted some effort to the consideration of foreign fascism during his first year in the BUF. His principle experience abroad during this time was a short vacation in Germany, which he took during the winter of 1934-5. While en route to Feldberg in southern Germany he stopped briefly in Berlin, where he was asked “by a German of note” whether he wished to meet Hitler.¹²² He leapt at the opportunity and was granted an audience with Hitler in the old Reichskanzlerei. As Fuller recounted afterwards, their

¹²² J. F. C. Fuller, “Notes on German Mechanization,” *The Fighting Times*, Oct. 1940, 276.

conversation focused for the most part on the First World War. He was nevertheless impressed by Hitler's grasp of the importance of mechanization; he was left "in no doubt" that Hitler recognized that resolution of the next war would depend on the use of mechanized arms.¹²³ Fuller was very readily convinced that Hitler, the dynamic leader of what Fuller considered to be a modernist and "scientific" movement, would naturally pursue a policy of general mechanization. His principle obstacle, he reasoned, would be the German military leadership, "for not one of his leading generals was as yet 'mechanized' in spirit, and being for the most part elderly men they were never likely to become so."¹²⁴ During their conversation, Hitler had also made the comment, illustrative of his political philosophy, that "the people are impotent, they cannot rule themselves; yet I cannot rule the people unless I am the soul of the people."¹²⁵ Hitler's attitude towards politics and the military establishment, taken together, fit very neatly into Fuller's conception of the role of the authoritarian leader in a fascist state. The Leader, the unchallenged representative of the people, would sweep aside all resistance to the cause of modernization and rationalization.

Aside from his chance meeting with Hitler, Fuller gave relatively little consideration to international questions during the first months of 1935. He briefly turned away from his standard commentary on the poor state of Britain's military to argue, in an article titled "Imperial Defense," that Britain should assume an isolationist stance similar to that which had characterized British diplomacy between 1815 and 1875. Rather than "mixing ourselves up in the tangled net of international politics," the British should focus

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ J. F. C. Fuller, *Towards Armageddon: The Defence Problem and Its Solution* (London: L. Dickson, 1937), 43.

on rearmament and military reorganization.¹²⁶ In place of Britain's then-close involvement in the League of Nations, Fuller argued that Britain should rather seek to maintain friendly relations with the United States as well as fascist Italy. An "entente" with Italy, according to Fuller, would be particularly advantageous, as Britain could then freely stand apart from any future Franco-German conflict without fearing any threat to the Mediterranean or the North Sea.¹²⁷ In another article, he repeated his standard arguments against the League of Nations, returning to the concept behind *Empire Unity and Defense* that the British Empire was "the only peaceful league of nations which exists."¹²⁸ Britain should consolidate the empire and rearm, "not because we want to fight anyone in particular, but because, as long as the inmates of the European war asylum remain criminal lunatics, a bludgeon, though it may not solve a political argument, can defend our lives."¹²⁹ These stray comments represent for the most part little beyond what Fuller had already argued for in more detail in *Empire Unity and Defense* and elsewhere. Fuller continued to regard the international situation as a problem for other nations; Britain should disengage from its international obligations and focus on the development of the empire. Insofar as alliances with other states should be pursued, they should be pursued purely with British interests in mind, rather than any altruistic motives.

Fuller's most striking comments on the international situation during this period were found in his article on "Germany – As I See It," published in *English Review* in May. While this article contained few explicit policy recommendations, it clearly showed the evolution of Fuller's attitude towards Nazi Germany – and significantly

¹²⁶ J. F. C. Fuller, "Imperial Defense," *The Nineteenth Century and After*, February, 1935.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ J.F.C. Fuller, "Britain Should Use The Big Stick," *Sunday Mail*, March 31, 1935, 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

foreshadowed the pro-Nazi stance that Fuller would exhibit with greater force in the wake of his disappointing experience of Italian fascism during the Italian-Ethiopian War. While Fuller stopped short of the more extreme pro-Nazi sentiments that he later adopted (claiming merely to be expressing the opinion of a “considerable yet inarticulate minority” of Britons favorably disposed towards the Nazi regime),¹³⁰ he nevertheless displayed considerable sympathy for the German dictator and for Nazism generally. He also attempted to excuse the brutality of the Nazi regime, downplaying German atrocities or defending them as unavoidable in the circumstances. Hitler appeared to Fuller as an almost saint-like figure, a man of the people who was “as a spark” to the “inert bits of despondent humanity” of the German people.¹³¹ Hitler had raised Germany from the “slough of despond” created by the Treaty of Versailles, “[raising] an entire nation from degradation to a sense of dignity.”¹³² Fuller already believed that Hitler was one of the greatest figures of the age – “...whatever history may relate of him,” Fuller wrote, “[Hitler] will pass down the ages as one of the most remarkable personalities of this century.”¹³³

Nazi policy seemed to Fuller to be worthy of admiration, if not necessarily of emulation. He discerned two underlying principles of Nazism – the paramount importance of the “common weal” over “personal advantage” (“this may be called Hitlerism”) and the restoration of Germany’s status as a Great Power.¹³⁴ According to Fuller, the first principle had been taken to extreme lengths during the “events of June 30 last” – the Knight of Long Knives, which was one of the most infamous examples of

¹³⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, "Germany - As I See It," *The English Review* (May 1935): 584.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 587.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 586.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 586.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 587.

Nazi barbarity in 1934.¹³⁵ The open violence with which the so-called “Röhm Putsch” was repressed had in fact been perfectly justified. “Though possibly and probably Hitler realized that a number of innocent people were likely to suffer with the guilty,” Fuller explained, “my opinion is that he felt that this was better for the Reich than long drawn-out trial which would have degraded Germany in her own eyes.”¹³⁶ This was evidently an example – “ruthless in its personal application”¹³⁷ – of the principle of common good before private gain! As regards Hitler’s bellicose rhetoric, Fuller suggested that this was no more than a campaigning tactic: “when Hitler says he stands for peace,” Fuller wrote, “we may believe him.”¹³⁸ Fuller’s views as outlined in “Germany – As I See It,” however, fall short of endorsing Nazi policy altogether – let alone suggesting that British politics should be reorganized along Nazi lines. From his experiences in Germany, Fuller concluded that the Nazi state was in danger of “over-organization – the mechanization of body and soul.”¹³⁹ If Nazism were to lead to the creation of a rigidly bureaucratic state, Fuller declared, “Germany is doomed.”¹⁴⁰ The lessons that Fuller drew from the German example were extremely broad – Hitler’s success merely demonstrated the importance of “energetic minorities led by daring individual personalities” in world history.¹⁴¹ The German model, in fact, did not appear to Fuller to be capable of importation to Britain: “...in the conditions which surround us,” Fuller wrote, “there would appear to be little room for a man of the type of Hitler...”¹⁴² Fuller merely suggested that there was room

¹³⁵ Ibid., 587.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 588.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 587.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 589.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 591.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 591.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 591.

¹⁴² Ibid., 591.

for Hitler's "faith, energy and single-mindedness" in the British political system – in short, room for what Fuller conceived to be the platform offered by the BUF.¹⁴³

In spite of the clearly positive opinion of Nazi Germany that Fuller expressed in his article for the *English Review* – which stood out as a singular anomaly in his journalistic output in 1935 – Fuller's general attitude on foreign affairs during this period may be characterized as cautiously pro-Italian. His views would be put to the test as he became increasingly involved with the practical questions of BUF foreign policy as war between Italy and Abyssinia loomed in August 1935. An article by Fuller marked the beginning of *Blackshirt's* antiwar campaign, appearing on August 23 under the headline "Britain Must Keep Out of the War."¹⁴⁴ Fuller's article staked out his basic position on the developing international crisis. Although presented in forceful and simplistic language, his case against intervention in the Italian-Ethiopian conflict drew heavily from his established analysis of the "natural history of war." Italy, according to Fuller, had been denied the fulfillment of its rightful territorial ambitions by the Treaty of Versailles. Lacking an outlet for its rapidly growing population (Fuller conveniently overlooked Italy's extant colonial holdings in Libya and Eritrea), Italy faced a stark choice between territorial expansion and starvation. As starvation could in all probability lead to Italy falling to Bolshevism, Italy was forced to accept the conquest of Ethiopia as the "lesser evil."¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Ethiopia was particularly suited to colonization, being sparsely populated and "potentially rich." The underdeveloped state of Ethiopian society was offered as a further justification for Italian aggression: "What is just in Abyssinia,"

¹⁴³ Ibid., 591.

¹⁴⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, "Britain Must Keep Out of the War," *Blackshirt*, August 23, 1935, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

according to Fuller, “would be classed as sheer brutality in the most backward of our colonies.”¹⁴⁶

Many of the themes that Fuller touched upon in his initial article would be taken up and elaborated as the BUF launched its first great antiwar campaign under the slogan “Mind Britain’s Business” in September. In the meantime Fuller departed for Germany, where he was dispatched as a military correspondent for the *Daily Mail*. Fuller was the sole foreign correspondent to witness the German army maneuvers on Lüneburg Heath.¹⁴⁷ What he saw of the German military confirmed his belief in the basic anti-modernism of traditional military organizations. Fuller met Field Marshal von Blomberg and General Beck, both of whom were staying at his hotel. Although sympathetic to mechanization, Beck and von Blomberg, according to Fuller’s later reflection, lacked the “violent and revolutionary” interest in military modernism “which alone can jog military thought out of its monastic ruts.”¹⁴⁸ The head of the German army, General von Fritsch, struck Fuller as even less capable of grasping the reality of modern warfare:

Though very Prussian, to me he was peculiarly English, for I sensed that he looked upon my humble self as a military Anti-Christ, a kind of mechanical fiend who was out to destroy the glory of von Bredow and obscure in smoke and smell the glittering gatherings on the hill of Frenois and suchlike things.¹⁴⁹

Fuller’s analysis in his articles was more forgiving. The German army’s lack of modern weaponry was a blessing in disguise for, without the retarding influence of old weapons, the German army would be relatively free to embrace the principles of modern warfare.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 187.

¹⁴⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, “Notes on German Mechanization,” *The Fighting Forces* (October 1940): 277.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 277.

Fuller concluded, therefore, that “the tactical possibilities of the German army are overwhelming.”¹⁵⁰

Fuller moreover was extremely impressed by the martial spirit exhibited by soldiers and civilians alike, which confirmed his belief in the capacity of fascism to bring about a European spiritual revival. As he argued, the important part of the maneuvers was not the military action itself – which was, due to the lack of modern weaponry, largely anachronistic – but rather “the spirit behind what was done.”¹⁵¹ He had nothing but praise for the martial fervor displayed by the participants, remarking that “never do I remember having seen so keen a delight by soldiers in soldiering, or so keen an appreciation of things military as was displayed by these thousands of spectators...”¹⁵² His conclusion was predictable: “In this spirit lies the foundation of German military strength. The rest, important thought [sic] it is, is nothing more than common sense.”¹⁵³ This represented reaffirmation of Fuller’s belief that the spiritual revival of fascism could overcome military conservatism and bring about genuine modernization. What Fuller had seen at the German maneuvers appeared to vindicate his embrace of fascism as a means to achieve military reform.

Fuller’s next journey abroad would take him to Italy and from there to Abyssinia, where he would have his first opportunity to see how well a fascist government could cope with a real war – something more substantive than well-rehearsed maneuvers. In late September, Lord Rothermere appointed Fuller to serve as the *Daily Mail* correspondent to Ethiopia in the event of an Italian invasion. Fuller accepted the

¹⁵⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, “British General & German Army Test,” *The Daily Mail*, September 5, 1935, 10.

¹⁵¹ J. F. C. Fuller, “Giant German Army March-Past,” *The Daily Mail*, September 9, 1935, 10.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

assignment which, as Fuller's articles from the front lines reveal, called upon Fuller to engage in a purely military analysis of developments in the war. Fuller was however by no means a dispassionate observer. As he indicated in a report written to Lord Rothermere after his return, summarizing his experiences in Abyssinia, Fuller understood the *Daily Mail's* official attitude towards the war to be that "the war is an unwise one, yet it is no business of ours, and in the present explosive state of Europe any restrictions placed on Italy are dangerous."¹⁵⁴ The *Daily Mail's* editorial policy was thus firmly within the newspaper's tradition of sympathy and – at times – outright support for Italian fascism.

Fuller's own perspective on the war, however, went beyond the tepid non-interventionism advocated by the *Daily Mail*. In a letter to Mosley written soon after he received his appointment as special correspondent, Fuller asked the BUF leader to send a private letter to Mussolini requesting certain special accommodations. Fuller hoped to have a private meeting with Mussolini. He hoped moreover to use Mosley's connections to receive preferential treatment, stating that, "as a correspondent, I particularly want to get away from the mob of correspondents. What would suit me best would be to be attached to G. H. Q., anyhow to start with. As a soldier I shall know how much not to repeat."¹⁵⁵ As justification for his requested privileges, Fuller noted that "(1) I am a trained soldier. (2) I am a full-blooded Fascist."¹⁵⁶ Fuller offered the assurance that he would be "only too pleased to help his [Mussolini's] policy." Sympathy for Mussolini's

¹⁵⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on Italo-Abyssinian War with Special Reference to the Campaign in Tigre," January 1936, box 5, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

¹⁵⁵ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, September 1935, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

fascist regime therefore brought Fuller to the point of supporting Italian aggression outright, rather than merely advocating British non-intervention. Fuller believed that his reporting could give real support to the Italian cause in Britain: "I think I can be of real help to Mussolini as well as to the Daily Mail."¹⁵⁷

Privately, the journey to Ethiopia represented more to Fuller than merely the opportunity to serve either as a war correspondent or as a propagandist. The Ethiopian war was Fuller's first chance to see whether the vigorous military rationalism that he attributed to fascism in theory held up in practice. Fuller had expressed his belief earlier in the year that "the outlook of Fascism upon war is a commonsense one, for the Fascist is a realist."¹⁵⁸ The fascist does not simply give in to hysteria: "He is open to examine the problem as a physician examines a patient...if the problem is solvable it will be solved scientifically, that is by seeking truth, maintaining an impartial mind and working in an orderly way."¹⁵⁹ It remained to Fuller to see whether real fascists employed as scientific and systematic an approach to the problems of war as the ideal fascist of his imagination. Fuller thus undertook his mission to Abyssinia with several overlapping intentions: as a correspondent, to report on military events as he saw them; as a fascist, to support the policies of Mussolini's government; and as an intellectual and military critic, to test the accuracy of his own assertions about the nature of fascism.

Fuller departed for Italy on October 3, arriving in Rome on the fourth.¹⁶⁰ The next day his first article on the war appeared in the *Daily Mirror* under the headline "How I

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, "Fascism and War," *Fascist Quarterly* (April 1935): 140.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, "Abyssinian Diary," Fall 1935, box 4, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ., 1.

Would Conquer Abyssinia.”¹⁶¹ Fuller started his analysis from the proposition that the war should be as short as possible as a long war would be exhausting and would necessarily weaken Italy relative to other European powers.¹⁶² Believing that the Ethiopian government was held together only tenuously, he advocated the use mobile forces to seize the capital as soon as possible. After the occupation of Ethiopia’s political center, “my main military problem will be solved; after that it will largely be replaced by one of police work and diplomacy.”¹⁶³

Fuller’s article provides an important guide for understanding how he approached and responded to the war in Ethiopia: “How I Would Conquer Abyssinia” represented a practical application of the principles of war that Fuller had developed based on his experiences in the First World War. It is in effect a blueprint for a “rationally” conducted war (what Fuller later called “totalitarian warfare”). Italy’s success or failure in implementing this (or a similar) strategy therefore played a crucial role in shaping his reaction to continental fascism in general and Italian fascism in particular.

The day after arriving in Rome, Fuller called on the Italian Minister of Propaganda and received a formal letter of introduction to Mussolini – apparently due to Mosley’s intervention on his behalf.¹⁶⁴ Fuller’s appointment with Mussolini was fixed for October 7; he spent much of the intervening two days sightseeing, observing in his diary that the people appeared to be very calm in spite of the recently-declared war.¹⁶⁵ On the appointed day, he was met by Count Muiervi, the secretary to the Minister of

¹⁶¹ J. F. C. Fuller, “How I Would Conquer Abyssinia,” *The Daily Mirror*, October 10, 1935, 12.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, “Abyssinian Diary,” Fall 1935, box 4, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Propaganda, who accompanied Fuller to Mussolini's home in the Piazza de Vennezia. After waiting for less than five minutes, Fuller was shown into "the great man's room."¹⁶⁶

Surprised by the dictator's short stature, Fuller found "the great man" to be an able conversationalist, "as easy to talk to as...Hitler."¹⁶⁷ Conversing in French, Mussolini first inquired how Fuller intended to get to Abyssinia. Upon hearing that Fuller had some concerns about traveling by air, Mussolini immediately called in an official from the Colonial Office. Fuller's passage to the theater of war by Italian troop transport was arranged forthwith – an ostentatious and no doubt deliberate display of power. Their conversation then turned to the situation in England, which Fuller attempted to explain. The Abyssinian crisis, according to Fuller, was "virtually over." At the worst, the League of Nations might impose sanctions on Italy "which were not sanctions at all." Mussolini expressed astonishment at the hostility of the British press towards the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a phenomenon that Fuller ascribed to Jewish influence. Fuller explained his view that "behind the political situation was the international situation – the fight between the old world v. the new." According to Fuller, "Jewry dreaded fascism + would do its utmost to smash it." In consequence, Mussolini should seek to end the war as quickly as possible "because the weak link in the Italian harness was her staying power." Drawing on the argument that he had outlined in "How I Would Conquer Abyssinia," Fuller further warned that foreign powers would be quick to take advantage of any Italian weaknesses revealed over the course of a long war. Mussolini finally inquired into the progress of the fascist movement in England, which Fuller explained in full.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

Reflecting on the meeting, Fuller considered Mussolini himself to be impressive – “a man of Napoleonic caste.” He and his government were nevertheless not without flaws. Fuller believed that Mussolini was ill served by his subordinates “who being dominated by his forceful personality are reduced to knock kneed yes men.” These subordinates effectively controlled the population in a way that Fuller compared to the “doping” effect of artificial stimulants. Fuller speculated that this method of mass control might prove problematic for Italy in the long run. While Nazi Germany (in Fuller’s estimation) suffered from an excess of government organization, in Italy “the enemy seems likely to be a reducing ability to react to artificial stimulation.” In his short stay in Italy, Fuller already believed that he could perceive this effect: “Even now in its earliest stages, as far as I sense it, by the masses of the people, the war is looked upon as a colonial fancy – a private war of Mussolini’s + not a national affair.”¹⁶⁹ Privately, therefore, Fuller had already begun to have his doubts about the success of Italian fascism and the effectiveness of dictatorship. A single dictator – even one of “Napoleonic caste” – could be deceived and rendered ineffective by his subordinates. Excessive propaganda-driven “stimulation” – the manifestations of which Fuller had perhaps considered as part of the spiritual revolution of fascism – could fail in its essential purpose if used improperly. The disinterested attitude of Italians towards the war, which Fuller had divined after only two days in Rome, was evidence that fascism was not always capable of fulfilling its promise of mobilizing whole populations for a common cause.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

Three days later Fuller set sail for Abyssinia. In his earlier letter to Mosley, Fuller had expressed his particular desire to travel for Italy aboard an Italian transport.¹⁷⁰ This would give Fuller an opportunity to observe the Italian army firsthand, “away from the mob of correspondents.”¹⁷¹ Fuller was immediately struck by the shoddy and unmilitary appearance of the troops onboard: “They certainly do not look like our soldiers: their clothing fits anyhow and appears shoddy, their carbines are rusty and ill kept; in fact they look what I believe them to be – armed colonists.”¹⁷² He speculated that the men he saw were not primarily intended for combat roles, serving instead to follow up the professional soldiers and native troops. An English-speaking Italian officer later identified the men as Blackshirt Volunteers – political soldiers – many of whom would most likely volunteer to remain in the conquered territories after the war.¹⁷³ Fuller optimistically concluded that this confirmed his theory that the troops were primarily colonists, an illusion that he was unable to sustain in light of his subsequent experience.

What Fuller had seen aboard the Italian transport ship proved a fitting prelude for what was to come. The Italian army in Ethiopia fell far short of Fuller’s high expectations. Rather than a resounding demonstration of the fascist military spirit – the rational, disciplined and scientific approach to war that was, for Fuller, one of fascism’s chief attractions – the Italian military effort, from the highest levels of planning to the lowliest Blackshirt volunteers, amounted to little less than a military travesty. The soldiers themselves were motley and ill-disciplined. Having spent a day accompanying a

¹⁷⁰ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, September 1935, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² J. F. C. Fuller, "Abyssinian Diary," Fall 1935, box 4, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ., 4.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 5.

unit of Blackshirts, Fuller devoted one of the lengthiest passages in his diary to a detailed deconstruction of the competence and military virtues of the Italians. The troops themselves were “a curious collection of men who looked like brigands and enjoyed looking like it. Their discipline I should say was nil.”¹⁷⁴ While they might possibly serve some use in a brawl, they struck Fuller as utterly out of place on the battlefield: “They are outwardly and inwardly the most unsoldierlike bunch of men I have ever seen masquerading as soldiers.”¹⁷⁵ Their appearance was eccentric. Many wore badges depicting lightning flashes or skulls with daggers in their teeth – “it was all very melodramatic and unsoldierly[,] a kind of Pirates of Penzance business.” Much of their activity seemed intended to express manliness, rather than to serve a particular military function. Fuller recorded that a rearguard unit, having completed an exhausting fifteen mile march, volunteered to serve as the advance guard the very next day. Their commanding officer, impressed by the gesture, at once agreed. The professional soldier within Fuller balked. “It was not a question whether an advance guard should be fresh or not,” Fuller sighed, “but one of the spirit of Fascism.”¹⁷⁶

The leadership of the men was further cause for dismay. Fuller recounted that the unit’s leader, called “General” Mantagua by his men, was “really a Colonel, but is called General because his Blackshirts like this title better.” His second in command – a poet in civilian life – was also called “General,” having once held the rank of Consul General.¹⁷⁷ Fuller could hardly approve of the sort of military in which, as he observed, “an officer is made second in command of 4000 men, not because he is a good soldier but [because he

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 18.

is] a Fascist poet.”¹⁷⁸ The war, he concluded, was “not a demonstration of soldiership but of Fascism.”¹⁷⁹ He was not at all impressed. The absurdity of the situation was manifestly comical, yet the Italians behaved with the utmost sincerity and seriousness. This struck Fuller as a serious flaw:

I have noticed this lack of humour from Mussolini downwards. It is the type met with among small children. A boy plays at being an engine driver and these people play at being soldiers. Everything is done to show what men they are when all the time they are children.¹⁸⁰

Italian incompetence, moreover, was not restricted purely to military affairs. Already, Fuller found reason to condemn Mussolini’s form of fascism entirely. The Italians, according to Fuller, elevated their leader to the level of a deity:

The Duce is their god, and the fundamental weakness in the Italian System is that he is not immortal. Gods must not die for death reveals them as being pseudo-gods and humans – then comes the crash.¹⁸¹

Having spent less than a month in the theater of war, Fuller had already concluded that Mussolini’s dictatorship was a contributing factor in the incompetence that he observed. The entire system was childish and, ultimately, unsustainable.

Moreover, the war itself appeared to be fundamentally ill-considered. Assessing the general dispersal of Italian forces, Fuller commented that “who ever planned this campaign must have been a military lunatic.”¹⁸² General de Bono, the overall commander of the Italian army in Ethiopia, struck Fuller as an effective nonentity. “He did not impress me,” Fuller wrote. “Too old. I doubt whether he lasts long.”¹⁸³ Italian planning indicated a fundamental lack of understanding of logistics, having “no idea of the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸² Ibid., 10.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 10.

proportion between supply and tactical power.”¹⁸⁴ The invasion was on the whole impractical given the limited logistical base. Massana, the port through which much of the Italian supplies ultimately passed, appeared to be “totally inadequate for so extensive an operation.”¹⁸⁵ There was simply no way to provide the Italian forces with adequate supplies. “The forces in front represent a pumpline on a slender straw,” Fuller wrote. “The straw is far too small. This is a European war campaign on small war communications.”¹⁸⁶ An Italian victory, in spite of Italy’s theoretically overwhelming superiority, did not appear likely – at least not in the short term.

As it happened, Fuller was denied the opportunity to see how things would turn out firsthand. Already by mid-November it had become very difficult to report on developments on the front lines. In a letter to his mother, Fuller complained that he and his fellow journalists were stationed too far from the front to do their jobs effectively. “The front is really 200 miles south of us,” he explained, “and it takes so long to get there, at least 2 days, that unless we are moved forward, which seems unlikely, I think I shall return to England some time next week.”¹⁸⁷ On November 16, he learned that De Bono had been replaced as general in command of Italian operations, Marshal Badoglio having been substituted in his place. While good news for the Italians, this change proved a bad omen for the war correspondents in Abyssinia. As Fuller recounted in *The First of the League Wars*, Badoglio imposed very tight restrictions on the freedom of the press. Journalists were confined to Asmara and were permitted to leave the area only under extraordinary circumstances; the use of names of localities, units and individuals in

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁷ J. F. C. Fuller to Thelma Fuller, November 15, 1935, box 2, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

dispatches was expressly forbidden; any reference to troop movements, whether of the Italians or Abyssinians, was likewise restricted.¹⁸⁸ Fuller concluded, not without reason, that the restrictions were intended to drive all foreign journalists out of the country.¹⁸⁹

On returning to England in January, Fuller immediately set about analyzing his experiences in Italy and Ethiopia. The result of this effort was a lengthy report for the *Daily Mail* on the conduct of the first months of the Italian-Ethiopian War.¹⁹⁰ The thirty-nine page report – which has thus far remained unknown – constitutes a synoptic account of the Italian military effort in Ethiopia. Fuller offers a description of the origins of the conflict and the various events of the campaign, colored by his own personal experiences. This account is particularly important because it gives a complete picture of how Fuller’s views developed in direct response to his experiences in Ethiopia. The report also sheds considerable light on Fuller’s otherwise inexplicable rejection of Italian fascism in particular and foreign fascism generally, which was characteristic of the later development of his political thought.

Fuller’s description of the Italian military campaign throughout his report for the *Daily Mail* is scathing. The Italians had initiated the war having made “the meagerest [sic] preparations...for the coming conflict.”¹⁹¹ The initial plan for the campaign was decided upon according to means that Fuller described as “nothing other than military witchcraft.”¹⁹² The Italian military leadership was ancient and out of step with modern developments. The fighting men themselves were useless, being “totally unsuited to the

¹⁸⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, *The First of the League Wars* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1936), 27-28.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on Italo-Abyssinian War with Special Reference to the Campaign in Tigre," January 1936, box 5, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

operations which face them.”¹⁹³ Altogether, the Italian force constituted “a comic opera army, a huge melodramatic troupe: a gathering of armed men in which each group possesses a discipline or lack of discipline of its own.”¹⁹⁴ This was very far from what Fuller had been led to expect; it was certainly not the scientific and rational approach to war that Fuller believed was characteristic of fascism.

Many of the flaws that Fuller found in the Italian military campaign moreover appeared to be symptomatic of Italian Fascism generally. The Italian army’s incompetence was not merely a product of poor military leadership – political leadership shared much of the blame. “Not only are the Italian forces in Abyssinia not organized for war in that country,” Fuller argued, “but they are not organized for war in any country, civilized or barbaric.”¹⁹⁵ The entire war was nothing more than a “political demonstration in uniform.” Rather than a “tactical instrument,” the Italian army appeared to Fuller to be “grouped together like a Lord Mayor’s show. It contains a bit of everything, not because each bit is tactically valuable, but because the whole is politically symbolic of a united Fascist Italy. It is, therefore, representative of Italy and not of Italy’s military strength – it is in short the chorus of Mussolini and not a fighting instrument.”¹⁹⁶

Fuller’s opinion of Mussolini was, on reflection, no less scathing than his opinion of the Italian armed forces. Of his meeting with the Italian leader, Fuller wrote that,

From common report I had been led to look upon him [Mussolini] as a realist and a futurist; but after having spoken with him for a few minutes I was disillusioned. He appeared to me to possess neither of these qualities; instead I found him to be an idealist and a mythologist. In place of looking forwards he was looking backwards, and instead of accepting the world as it is, his whole inclination was obviously directed towards recreating the world as it once had been. In fact, he was not an Italian, he was a Roman, an avatara who when he looked out on the Mediterranean saw a Roman sea, and when on

¹⁹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 13.

Africa – a Roman land. France to him was Greece, England Carthage and Germany the land of the dread barbarians of the north.¹⁹⁷

This was not at all what Fuller had hoped to find in the representative of what he conceived to be a thoroughly forward-looking and modernizing ideology. Fuller further criticized much of Mussolini's policy throughout his rule. His response to the economic crisis was essentially classical in conception: Mussolini had recruited his "superfluous Italian manhood" into Blackshirt units, which were "no more than bands of armed unemployed."¹⁹⁸ This policy led to the growth of bureaucracy "by leaps and bounds until the nation was all but throttled."¹⁹⁹ Fuller even went so far as to implicitly criticize the very concept of autocracy. He described Mussolini as "the most isolated man in Italy," who, being surrounded by "sycophants and yes-men" was in consequence "as cut off from reality as a mummy in its sarcophagus, and is in fact little more than a kingly corpse wrapped in yards and yards of bureaucratic red-tape."²⁰⁰

Given the flawed organization of the Italian state and the Italian army's fundamentally misguided approach to the conflict, Fuller was not sanguine about Mussolini's ability to bring the Ethiopian war to a successful conclusion. While offering the prudent reservation that "it is always risky to predict how a war is going to end," Fuller pronounced his judgment that "after having been three months in Eritrea and after having spoken to hundreds of people, I can see no silver lining to this one."²⁰¹ He returned to his earlier criticism that Italy's invasion of Ethiopia was misguided in the extreme. "That it was ever launched," Fuller declared, "seems to me to have been the act of a mad man, and as it has been planned and conducted goes more than to accentuate

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 32.

this supposition.”²⁰² By invading Ethiopia, Mussolini had bitten off much more than he could chew. It was a war not only against Ethiopia, but also “against world opinion as concentrated in the League.”²⁰³ Even more importantly, Fuller added, “it is a war against nature.”²⁰⁴ Inhospitable conditions in Ethiopia represented a grave threat to the Italian forces due to the failure of the Italian leadership to take them sufficiently into account and establish an adequate logistical base. The vast Italian force in Ethiopia was left at the mercy of the weather and faced, as a result, the possibility of a disaster on an even greater scale than that of Adowa. Although Italy still had the chance to salvage the war (by bringing her strategy into line with the course that Fuller had proposed in his article on “How I Would Conquer Abyssinia”), Fuller feared that it was already too late. “The crucial factor which governs this possible new campaign is time,” Fuller suggested. “It could scarcely be initiated before the monsoons break, and has Italy the staying power to endure a further eighteen months of war? I doubt it...”²⁰⁵

Italy’s project in Ethiopia was thus faced by the real possibility of failure. The consequences of an Italian defeat were liable to be disastrous. Almost any possible outcome of an Italian defeat in Ethiopia could very likely lead to a larger and more destructive war. As Fuller wrote, “...if my reading of the character of Mussolini is in any way right, I feel that, should he be forced by failure, he will become desperate and look for any excuse to cover it by precipitating a still greater conflict.”²⁰⁶ The consequences would be even more terrible – if such a thing were possible – if Britain and the League of Nations precipitated an Italian defeat through the imposition of sanctions. Any

²⁰² Ibid., 32.

²⁰³ Ibid., 32.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 32.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 35.

restrictions imposed on Italian trade would simply provide Mussolini with “the excuse to set Europe ablaze.”²⁰⁷ Even worse, if the League of Nations went so far as to cut off the Italian supply of oil (which Fuller rightly considered an essential resource for the Italian war effort), “a greater [war] will of a certainty be started.”²⁰⁸

Fuller wrapped up his report with a short appendix in which he urged a modification of the *Daily Mail*'s policy on the Italian-Ethiopian War. Summarizing the pro-Italian editorial policy of the *Daily Mail*, Fuller argued that the paper should substantially withdraw its support from Mussolini. While the *Daily Mail* would be well advised to support Italian policy in order to prevent Italy from falling to communism (which would inevitably follow an Italian defeat in Ethiopia), Fuller stated that “a clear distinction should be made between Mussolini and Italy, because this is patently Mussolini's war.”²⁰⁹ According to his logic, it followed that, “by degrees, the ‘Daily Mail’ should withdraw its support from the former [Mussolini] without abandoning the latter [Italy].”²¹⁰ Fuller even went so far as to speculate that “for us a military dictatorship will be no worse than a Fascist, and it may be better as it will bring the King to the top.”²¹¹

Fuller's willingness to consider monarchy or military dictatorship preferable to fascism underscores the depth of his disillusionment with the Italian government. Direct experience with Mussolini's regime had revealed to Fuller what he conceived to be essential flaws in the Italian system: Mussolini's government was not at all an exemplar of the vigorous, rational, anti-democratic modernism that he believed was central to the

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 38.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹¹ Ibid., 38.

spirit of fascism. It was natural that Fuller's negative reaction to Italian fascism would have some influence on his view of the BUF. The flaws of the Italian system led him to certain unpleasant conclusions about the state of the British fascist movement. The BUF was heavily influenced by Mussolini and Italian Fascism. Although BUF "Italophilia" was already in decline by the early months of 1936 (Mosley shut down the BUF's Italian offices in response to worsening Italian-British relations in October 1935),²¹² the BUF was nevertheless still very firmly within the Italian fascist orbit. Mosley, by his own account, continued to enjoy close relations with Mussolini until after his marriage to Diana Mitford in Berlin in October 1936.²¹³ In view of the BUF's continued, overt orientation towards the unsatisfactory Italian model, Fuller was moved to recommend certain fundamental changes in the British fascist program.

Fuller's principle recommendation for the BUF was that the British fascist movement should seek to differentiate itself as much as possible from continental fascism as a purely *British* movement – and that it should adapt itself better to British character and aspirations. On the surface, this seems not to be an entirely radical departure from his previous attitude. Fuller recognized from his earliest participation in the BUF that British fascism, in its style and propaganda (if not in its ideological content and purpose), would have to be presented in a particularly British guise if it was to have any hope of success. "It should be remembered," Fuller had noted, "that for every one man and woman who applaud the words 'revolution' and 'dictatorship' there are ten who intensely dislike

²¹² Claudia Baldoli, "Anglo-Italian Solidarity? The Shift from Italophilia to Naziphilia in the BUF," in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 158.

²¹³ Mosley, *My Life*, 304.

them.”²¹⁴ Fuller’s earlier concern, however, was confined to making fascism appealing for a British audience. Fuller did not doubt that the ultimate object of the BUF, once it achieved widespread popularity, was still to be revolution and dictatorship. Experience with Italian fascism had led Fuller to question even these most basic goals of British fascism.

In early February, a few weeks after finishing his report for the *Daily Mail*, Fuller wrote to Mosley arguing that the British fascist movement should substantially change its course. “In my opinion,” Fuller wrote, “two things in the Movement are vital: (1) A Gospel or New Testament which is British; (2) A simple, stable and permanent organization.”²¹⁵ Regarding the first, “foreign elements must be cut out, + in the second all possible bureaucracy.”²¹⁶ Foreign influences, in Fuller’s opinion, constituted an essential – and potentially fatal – weakness for the BUF:

From what I have seen in Italy + Germany, Fascism, as expressed in those countries, will not fit the English. Both Hitler + Mussolini are riding for a fall. They may get up; but we do not want to fall with them; because we may never be able to get up again.²¹⁷

In consequence, Fuller argued that the BUF should adopt significantly different objectives, abandoning the movement’s previous goal of instituting an Italian-style fascist dictatorship.

As far as I see the problem [Fuller wrote], we want:

- (1) Not dictatorship, but business at the top, that is power of direction + power to decide things quickly + we instinctively do not like one-man control.
- (2) Not a bureaucratic Corporate State, but a democratic one. Planning from the bottom by the Corporations for the Corporations.
- (3) Not the regulation of culture, but its free expression. Freedom is the goal + must be the goal, + (1) + (2) are simply the mechanism to produce it.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, "Report on the Organization of the B.U.F.," October 1934, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham, 2.

²¹⁵ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, February 8, 1936, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Fuller further elaborated his criticism of dictatorship, arguing that the goal of establishing personal, authoritarian rule was misguided not merely because of British trepidation about “one-man control.” As he explained, “dictatorship is really too easy: it looks like a short cut; but for this country it is a blind lane. Transformation is the secret... and things must be transformed within the conditions which surround them, + they vary in each country.” Thus British Fascism must adapt itself more completely – not merely in its outward form and message, but in its fundamental ideology – to its social and political context. “We are not Italians, we are not Germans, we are British – this is the fundamental fact to guide us.”²¹⁹

Fuller’s recommendations were certainly radical. He essentially advocated a complete restructuring of the party’s program. He was too much of a realist to believe that these changes would be accepted by the membership of the BUF without resistance. “I do not think that these ideas are popular with many on your Staff,” Fuller admitted, “but I am certain they are right.”²²⁰ He was furthermore moved – not entirely coincidentally – to minimize his involvement in BUF administration. He suggested to Mosley that he should be replaced, “anyhow for the time being,” as Chairman of “B.U.F. Publications Ltd.,” and of “Blackshirt Ltd.”²²¹ His future, he suggested, was too uncertain to allow him to continue to take such an active role. Both organizations needed leaders capable of devoting themselves to their work wholeheartedly. Fuller also could not resist the temptation to express his displeasure that his attempted reorganization of the BUF had thus far brought about very few tangible results. “Last year,” he wrote, “I got you the

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

draft of “B.U.F. Regulations, and so far as I know nothing has happened as regards them.”²²²

This letter, together with his report for the *Daily Mail*, offers further evidence of the extent of Fuller’s frustration with fascism. What he had seen abroad was not all it was cracked up to be. The movement at home was organized in imitation of a flawed model, and seemed not to be amenable to reform. There appeared to be little hope that Fuller’s radical recommendations would be acted upon. Fuller did not quite sever his connection to the BUF altogether, but by resigning from his official leadership role he reduced his active participation – at least for a time – to a minimum. Due to the loss of almost all of Mosley’s correspondence with Fuller, Mosley’s reply is unknowable. Changes in the direction of BUF policy throughout 1936, however, suggest that at the very least Mosley’s thinking paralleled Fuller’s, even if he was not influenced by Fuller’s suggestions outright. Perhaps the most notable change was in the very name of the movement itself. In the summer of 1936, the BUF was rechristened the “British Union of Fascists and National Socialists.”²²³ Although the word “fascism” was preserved in the name of the movement, as Colin Cross explains, “the new title was rarely used in full and for practical purposes the Movement became known as ‘British Union’.”²²⁴ The term “National Socialism” for the most part replaced “Fascism” in the organization’s literary output. According to Cross, “‘National Socialism’ was an easier term to explain than ‘Fascism’ and might be expected to have an appeal to the left. ‘British Union’ was a simple, patriotic title.”²²⁵ This change may therefore be considered a very high profile

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Colin Cross, *Fascists in Britain* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1963), 139.

²²⁴ Ibid., 139.

²²⁵ Ibid., 139-40.

attempt on the part of Mosley's organization to distance itself from the "foreign elements" that Fuller decried. It seems likely that Fuller played some role in bringing this about.

In the time since Fuller's return, the Italian military campaign in Ethiopia had continued apace. Fuller maintained a lively interest in the course of the Italian invasion, writing further commentary for the *Daily Mail*. His pessimism in the early months of 1936 was reflected in an article in which he argued that Britain should withdraw its naval presence in the Mediterranean – apparently based on his fears that Mussolini would strike out in Europe if defeated in Ethiopia. Fuller's concerns over an Anglo-Italian conflict, however, rapidly melted away along with his belief in the likelihood of an Italian defeat, as it became clear that Italy had adopted a dramatically more effective strategy. Already by mid-February, Fuller's faith in the Italian campaign had recovered sufficiently that he speculated that the Italians might bring the war to a rapid close with one decisive blow.²²⁶ A string of Italian victories in March offered further cause for optimism. On April 4, Fuller confidently pronounced that he would be "in no way surprised if this war ended before the monsoons break in June."²²⁷

The revival of Italy's fortunes in the face of what had seemed in January to be insurmountable odds demanded some explanation. Fuller was convinced that he could perceive the first tentative steps of a new form of warfare – what he would later term "totalitarian warfare." "The Italian High Command," Fuller wrote, "has had the vision and the courage to develop a new technique of war from the weapons and appliances

²²⁶ J. F. C. Fuller, "Gen. Graziani's Next Move," *The Daily Mail*, February 17, 1936, 4.

²²⁷ J. F. C. Fuller, "Where Italy's Next Blow May Fall", *The Daily Mail*, April 4, 1936, 4.

which science and industry have placed at their disposal.”²²⁸ In sharp contrast with the old method – the traditional technique, reliant on massed infantry, which had achieved its tragic consummation in the trenches of the First World War, (“a ding-dong infantry clinch, slaughter, demoralization, and then a pursuit by horse and foot...”)²²⁹ – the Italians had, in a flash of inspiration, seized upon the latest weapons that modern science could provide. They employed the newest technology vigorously and remorselessly. What resulted was a military spectacle that called forth Fuller’s dizzying rhetorical acclamation: “Down this defile comes thundering the pursuit; bombers, fighters, followed on the ground by men on foot as fast as their legs can move them, and fed, like the Israelites of old, from the skies.”²³⁰ The Italians were at last waging war in a way that Fuller considered to be both scientific and rational – and intensely modern: “They have realized how, scientifically, to combine pack-animal, lorry, and aeroplane.”²³¹

Fuller’s prediction that the war would end before June proved accurate. Italian mechanized columns under the leadership of Marshall Badoglio occupied Addis Ababa triumphantly on May 5, bringing the war effectively to a close.²³² Fuller was quick to explain the military lessons of the Italian victory in fascist terms. In *Action*, Fuller published a lengthy article on May 7 titled “Lessons from Ethiopia: Collective Insanity.” The Italian victory, achieved through the vigorous use of the latest weaponry – particularly airpower and motorized infantry – proved the argument that Fuller had originally put forward the year before in his article on “Fascism and War.” Fascist Italy

²²⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, “Lessons of the Italian Drive,” *Daily Mail*, April 20, 1936, 5.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*, trans. P. D. Cummins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 204.

had approached the Ethiopian war with a spirit of decisiveness and determination impossible in democratic states. “The world to-day is politically divided into two groups of people – the talkers and the doers,” Fuller wrote. “The first represent the democratic nations...and the second, the Fascist.”²³³ As he explained, “When Mussolini goes to war he does so whole-heartedly, and he selects his leading soldier to lead his men.”²³⁴ The Italian approach to war was a logical outgrowth of fascist politics. “Because the Fascist Government is a scientific political instrument,” he argued, “it logically follows that the Fascist Army is a scientific military instrument.”²³⁵ This was of course a striking contrast with the approach to war characteristic of democratic states. In the First World War, according to Fuller, “the technique of war followed the technique of democracy – of massed numbers of men. The bullet replaces the ballot and man-power becomes the one and all-absorbing problem.”²³⁶ Thus just as massed infantry was, in his conception, “the military expression of democracy,” it seemed that the airpower and rapid motorized advances that the Italians had employed so effectively in Ethiopia were the military expression both of modernity and of fascism – that is to say, for him, effectively the same thing.²³⁷ The lessons that he drew from the experience of the war were twofold. In the first place, Britain and the League of Nations could no longer hope to achieve real results through the application of sanctions. The war in Ethiopia had proved decisively that a fascist state might, through the use of modern military technology, achieve victory long before sanctions could have a chance to take hold. The second lesson, which Fuller suggested less overtly, was that Britain herself should pursue military modernization

²³³ J. F. C. Fuller, “Lessons from Ethiopia: Collective Insanity,” *Action*, May 7, 1936, 9.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

along fascist lines. “What are we preparing for?” Fuller asked. “A war of scientific weapons? No! Instead a war of democratic saurian contests: massed struggles, massed slaughterings, and massed destruction; in three words – 1914 all over again!”²³⁸ This was nothing less than insanity “for, tactically speaking, in the next war we shall find that we have applied military sanctions against ourselves.”²³⁹

V. “TOTALITARIAN WARFARE”

By the summer of 1936, Fuller had begun to elaborate in more explicit terms the concept of “totalitarian warfare,” which would dominate much of his foreign policy analysis throughout the remainder of the decade – a concept which grew out of (and contributed to) his developing political views. “Totalitarian warfare” was in effect a synthesis of Fuller’s military and political thought. Its seeds had already been sown in much of Fuller’s earlier military writing. His championing of the latest military technology – the effect of which would be, in Fuller’s estimation, an escalation both of the pace and the (short-term) destructiveness of war – led him gradually to the conclusion that modern democratic states were particularly vulnerable to the new, faster pace of warfare. A nation could be overwhelmed and defeated by modern arms in the space of a few days or weeks (as France and Poland would be in 1939-40). It therefore appeared to Fuller to be imperative that nations adopt a posture of absolute readiness for war, if they were to have any chance to repel such an assault; the swift, decisive mechanized attack, which Fuller described (without negative connotation) as “totalitarian,” necessitated the total mobilization of national populations – in effect, the totalitarian organization of the

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

fascist state. The astonishing speed with which Italy was able to turn what had seemed to Fuller – as recently as January – to be imminent defeat into absolute victory, through the application of modern military methods, underscored the political consequences of “scientific” warfare. He began to speculate that such methods might be employed effectively not only against the relatively ill-equipped armies fielded by Ethiopia but even against the best defended nations in the world – not in the distant future, but in the present day.

On May 10, Fuller’s first explicit discussion of “totalitarian warfare” appeared in print in the *Sunday Dispatch* under the headline, “Europe’s Next War will be the Spring of a Tiger: Over in Four Weeks – or Even Four Hours.” The new type of warfare brought about by modern technology would bear little relation to that which predominated during the Great War. “This type of conflict,” Fuller declared, “must be forgotten; for the next great war will be based on a very different philosophy, namely, that of ‘Totalitarian Warfare.’”²⁴⁰ In the new type of war, the first glimmerings of which had appeared during the Italian campaign in Ethiopia, “there will be no challenge, no mobilization, simply the spring of a tiger.”²⁴¹ Militaries that simultaneously employed a large air force and an “immensely powerful and, above all, mobile mechanized and motorized land force” would be able to end wars on a much faster time scale than was previously possible. Turning to Germany, Fuller declared that Hitler had created just such a military. If Hitler went to war, Fuller argued, the results would be entirely different than they were in 1914-18: “Never does [Germany] intend to fight such a war again; for its end must mean Bolshevism. If she has to fight she will win or lose not in four exhausting years but in

²⁴⁰ J. F. C. Fuller, “Europe’s Next War will be the Spring of a Tiger,” *Sunday Dispatch*, May 10, 1936, 3.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

four weeks, four days – possibly four hours.”²⁴² Sanctions, the preferred weapon of the League of Nations, would have no opportunity to take effect in such a short timeframe. Fuller thus heavily suggested that Britain should discard sanctions and prepare for “totalitarian warfare,” accepting its radical implication that “civil life is merged into war preparedness.”²⁴³ Only a fascist state, Fuller implicitly suggested, could withstand the force and violence of totalitarian war. But while Fuller believed that Germany would be capable of waging totalitarian war, he was quick to deny that Hitler intended to do so: “...personally I believe Hitler to be a man of peace.”²⁴⁴

Fuller’s references to Hitler hint at another shift in his thought, which ran parallel to his newly articulated concept of “totalitarian warfare.” Nazi Germany began to appear to Fuller as the example *par excellence* of the successful implementation of fascism. Although Mussolini and Italy had been redeemed to some extent by their remarkable success in Ethiopia, Fuller was unable wholly to overlook the very obvious political and military flaws that he had witnessed firsthand. He admired the Italians for their victory in Ethiopia, but his confidence in Mussolini’s regime was irrevocably damaged. Yet although Fuller had seemed in early 1936 to be on the verge of renouncing fascism even in Britain, he nevertheless retained considerable faith in what he called the “new world conception.” The flaws of one fascist state were insufficient to challenge Fuller’s belief that fascism was the political expression appropriate to modernity, which was one of his most deeply-held convictions. Disappointed with Italian fascism, Fuller slid easily into enthusiastic support for Nazi Germany.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

These major shifts in Fuller's thought found their full expression in *The First of the League Wars: Its Lessons and Omens* – one of the two books he published in 1936. Brian Holden Reid described *The First of the League Wars* as “the most ideologically committed of all of [Fuller's] books.”²⁴⁵ The work is unique for its many overtly positive references to fascist ideology; Fuller's other books from the 1930s are in fact remarkable for their scrupulous avoidance of any explicit praise for fascism as such. Fuller's specific references to Mosley's movement in particular in most of his books are few and far between. Even in his journalism, Fuller almost never identified himself explicitly with fascism when writing for non-fascist publications. In *The First of the League Wars*, however, Fuller went so far as to openly advocate fascist government for Britain. Yet this is only the most flagrant example of the fascist undertones that pervade almost every page of the work not devoted exclusively to military analysis. *The First of the League Wars* is in fact the definitive statement of Fuller's thought as it had developed during his fascist decade – and probably the most complete, honest statement of his personal philosophy that he ever put forward. It is for this reason that it must form a central part of an analysis of Fuller's participation in the British fascist movement.

A large portion of *The First of the League Wars* is devoted to the Italo-Ethiopian War itself. Fuller's account of the conflict reconciled his earlier doubts about the Italian military with his admiration for its ultimate success in Ethiopia. Many of the criticisms that Fuller had voiced in his report for the *Daily Mail* were repeated, albeit less forcefully. Italy had gone to war with a cautious strategy that substituted political demonstration for military action and with an army “in few ways fashioned for

²⁴⁵ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 187.

totalitarian war.”²⁴⁶ The Italian military leadership was mired in what Fuller called the “Clausewitz epoch.” Their approach to war was fundamentally backward looking, and so doomed to failure. They were, in Fuller’s expression, “the alchemists of a past form of war instead of...the technicians of a new.”²⁴⁷ The troops themselves were un-soldierly and ill-disciplined – the army little more than “a Fascist demonstration; a gathering of men in which each group possessed a discipline or lack of discipline of its own.”²⁴⁸ Yet in the aftermath Ethiopia’s defeat, the Italian army’s deficit of military virtue appeared to Fuller in a new aspect. The unmilitary bearing of the soldiers, rather than a fault, seemed to be evidence of the vital spirit of fascism. “...In spite of all its crudeness,” Fuller wrote, “this Army of the Exodus which crossed the Red Sea in search of the Promised Land bore along with it the ark of a new military covenant. It was more than a patriotic horde, it was the embryo of a machine which breathed forth all the fierceness of dictatorship – a political Juggernaut in being.”²⁴⁹ But how did the Italian leadership ultimately succeed in using its “patriotic horde” to such good effect? According to Fuller, Mussolini and his generals simply “stumbled” upon totalitarian strategy and tactics. The decision of the League of Nations to impose sanctions on oil forced Mussolini to take decisive action. “Like a man with his back to the wall,” Fuller explained, “he was now compelled, not only to fight for Abyssinia, but for Italy, for Fascism, for his political life. What was the result? From the Italian point of view, the war forthwith was transformed into a Jihad, a holy war, a war for national preservation.”²⁵⁰ The relentless campaign that ensued, in which Mussolini threw every weapon at his disposal into the fight against Ethiopia, was

²⁴⁶ Fuller, *The First of the League Wars*, 81, 56.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

therefore simply a happy accident. Italy's astonishing success appeared to have been achieved in spite of – rather than because of – the Italian political and military leadership.

Yet the new form of warfare that Italy had demonstrated had “come to stay.”²⁵¹ “Totalitarian tactics” greatly favored the offensive. It seemed likely, therefore, that the aggressor in a future war would be strongly tempted to employ them. In fact, Fuller argued, “in another European war, because all nations will be very similarly armed, should the aggressor be an isolated nation, that is one encircled by potentially hostile air power, then it will be suicidal for its Government not to use surprise in its most ruthless form.”²⁵² The substance of “totalitarian warfare” itself, as Fuller explained it, was a natural outgrowth of his earlier military thought. The leading tactical idea of “totalitarian war” was “to strike at the civil will.”²⁵³ The military objective was no longer the destruction of the physical bodies of the enemy's soldiers, but the psychological destruction of the *will* – not only of the enemy's armed forces – but of their entire nation. This psychological attack, moreover, would not be gradually developed over the course of years, as the Entente had effectively destroyed Germany's will to fight through the enforcement of the blockade during the four years of the First World War. Rather, “totalitarian war” must “take the form of a *coup d'etat*: a conspiracy instead of a mobilization, and a bolt from the blue of a cloudless sky instead of a declaration preceded by political thunder.”²⁵⁴ According to Fuller, “Surprise is *the* essential.”²⁵⁵ The purpose of the assault upon the enemy's will would not be the Clausewitzian objective of “[imposing] will upon will; for the acceptance of one will by another is a rational act

²⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

²⁵² Ibid., 89.

²⁵³ Ibid., 169.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 174.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 174

which induces rational reaction.”²⁵⁶ Rather, “totalitarian warfare” would simply aim to terrorize populations into preferring peace to war.

The political consequences of “totalitarian warfare” were drastic. The new form of warfare appeared to Fuller to be a powerful argument for the urgent necessity of fascism. If “totalitarian tactics” had been so effective in Ethiopia, a relatively decentralized state by European standards, how much more effective would they be in wars between modern western nations? “The nearer belligerents coincide in striking power,” Fuller argued, “the more vital will surprise become. So vital, that a time is approaching when the first blow may be the last. In other words, while the war of 1914-18 consisted in a series of long-drawn-out inconclusive encounters, the next may possibly consist in one assault lasting but a few hours.”²⁵⁷ In such a struggle, in which the instant shock of the attack on the civilian population would be tremendous, states with greater “national discipline” would have the advantage. In a hypothetical war between France and Germany, for example, France would very likely be thrown into a panic by a sudden attack. Germany, on the other hand, “on account of the national discipline of her people, drilled into military unity by radio propaganda, panic in all probability will be avoided and time gained for her government to act in.”²⁵⁸ Germany, in other words, would be better able to withstand the new violence of “totalitarian warfare” because of the totalitarian organization of the Nazi state. Western democracies would therefore be compelled to adapt their political organization to the new military reality.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 176.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 169.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 170.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 170-1.

This was a lesson that the democracies would do well to learn before it was too late. Britain along with the other western powers should embrace totalitarian politics, as the national discipline that totalitarianism would bring would provide the only possible security against the shock of the new form of warfare. “Instead of anathematizing,” Fuller wrote, “[the democracies] should learn from their totalitarian opponents; for though their system of politics appears outwardly to be the apotheosis of force, within it palpitates a new spirituality – the control of human instincts and their compulsion under will to assume disciplined form.”²⁶⁰ This was the crux of Fuller’s new argument for fascism: totalitarian government was simply a military necessity. Moreover, totalitarianism was necessary not merely for the “spiritual” strength it would provide in the face of an attack against the civil will. Totalitarian government implied scientific government. “As warfare to-day is based upon science,” Fuller explained, “not only must fighting forces become more and more scientific, but the scientific method must be applied to an entire nation, so that every man, woman, and child can be fashioned into an enormous catapult which will hurl war upon the enemy.”²⁶¹ Totalitarianism would thus be nothing less than the application of the scientific method to politics. That Britain would see the wisdom of this argument in time, Fuller was less certain. “It is true that we are not a revolutionary or a warlike nation,” he admitted, “and it is true that in the hearts of our people there is a genuine hatred and fear of national and international turmoils.”²⁶² Nevertheless, there appeared to Fuller to be some hope that the British would come to embrace the “proper” form of totalitarianism.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 171.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 174.

²⁶² Ibid., 159.

²⁶³ Ibid., 159.

Fuller did not content himself merely with describing how the reality of modern military technology necessitated totalitarian government. He situated his analysis of the influence of “totalitarian warfare” on politics within an elaborated and politically charged account of the “natural history of warfare.” To some extent this account was simply a restatement of ideas that Fuller had already discussed at length in *The Dragon’s Teeth* and *War and Western Civilization*. There are nevertheless important differences in the “natural history of warfare” as described in *The First of the League Wars*, which reflect the evolution of Fuller’s thought since 1932-33. As before, Fuller’s analysis took the form of a highly idiosyncratic kind of historical materialism. According to Fuller, the history of Christendom (i.e., western civilization) can be divided into two epochs, a religious period and a mechanistic period. Both epochs were characterized by the urge for conquest – the religious period by the conquest of souls, the mechanistic period by the conquest of things.²⁶⁴ It is the latter period which occupies the bulk of Fuller’s attention in *The First of the League Wars*. As he explained, the emergence of conscript armies since the time of the French Revolution was an essential ingredient in the development of mass democracy.²⁶⁵ The French Revolution itself “was more an adaption to the conditions created by industrial needs than [a revolution] arising out of political motives.”²⁶⁶ The consequence of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars which followed was the triumph of what Fuller called the “international system of usury” – a concept of great importance in fascist ideology which had been entirely missing from Fuller’s earlier analysis of the “natural history of war.”²⁶⁷ The new system of

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 93.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 99-100.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 100.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 101.

international finance enabled the transformation of Western Europe “from an agricultural to an industrial civilization.”²⁶⁸ This transformation inaugurated a new epoch of war, which was characterized, according to Fuller, by the dominance of “horde armies” which would “kill off or quiet refractory wage-slaves, and put untold wealth into the pockets of the industrialists and financiers.”²⁶⁹

The new condition of industrial modernity that the financiers had helped to create in turn laid the foundation for alternative forms of civilization. On the one hand there was communism, which brought to its fullest extent the egalitarian ideal of the French Revolution, promising vengeance to the “outcast drift of dehumanized men and women,” the “backwash of the machines” of industrial civilization.²⁷⁰ According to Fuller, the Marxist concept of class struggle was an adaptation of the Darwinian notion of “survival of the fittest” to suit the needs of this oppressed class: “...as the doctrine of survival of the fittest seemed to explain the dominance of the new industrial bourgeoisie, a class without culture of compassion,” Fuller wrote, “Marx...seizing upon this principle, extracted by Darwin from the animal world, extended it to human society in the form of the class struggle.”²⁷¹ Fearing the power of Marxist ideology, which seemed the prelude to the destruction of their power, the ruling classes attempted to quiet the workers with “humanitarianism, out of which emanated a pink protoplasmic substance called ‘Socialism’; a kind of political hermaphrodite which stands half-way between man as a bloodthirsty ape and man as a psalm-singing angel.”²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 104.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 127.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 127-8.

²⁷² Ibid., 128.

But socialist humanitarianism was unable to remove the menace of communism altogether. In Russia, Lenin succeeded in establishing a communist government, what Fuller called “the Apotheosis of the Marxian Revolution.” This was, to Fuller, effectively inseparable from the triumph of Judaism. Whereas Fuller’s earlier analysis of the emergence of the Soviet Union had certainly been colored by anti-Semitic prejudice (which was not uncommon in contemporary British accounts of the Soviet Union), the paramount importance that anti-Semitism assumes in Fuller’s discussion of the “natural history of war” in *The First of the League Wars* was something new altogether. In Fuller’s conception, the triumph of communism was nothing less than the product of a Jewish conspiracy. As he wrote, “Now it is beyond dispute that, under the directive energy of Lenin, it was the Jews who established Bolshevism in Russia...”²⁷³ And to what purpose? According to Fuller, the Jews “turned the social order upside down in order to create chaos, so that the spirit of Judaism might move ‘upon the face of the waters,’ and create a Jewish cosmos.”²⁷⁴ The extent of Fuller’s descent into conspiratorial anti-Semitism is underscored by his citation of the notorious *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* – which since 1920 was well-known to be a forgery – as evidence of this putative Jewish plot. “The whole process of this destruction and re-creation is elaborated in the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*,” Fuller explained.²⁷⁵ Even as he acknowledged that the above work had been revealed to be a forgery, Fuller suggested in a footnote that this was immaterial. “What of that?” Fuller asked, “If a forger can cash in, as the Jews have cashed in on Russia, whether the cheque is genuine or forged the victim

²⁷³ Ibid., 132.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 132-3.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 133.

experiences an identical discomfort.”²⁷⁶ At any rate, he contended himself with citing the letter from Buruch Levy to Karl Marx, which had been published in *La Revue de Paris* in 1928 – and which was also well-known as an anti-Semitic fabrication – as evidence of the malevolent Jewish conspiracy that lay behind communism. That letter revealed, according to Fuller, the real purpose of “Marxian materialistic dialectics,” which was “to capture and then capitalize the machine by means of the class war, the spirit of which was hatred and therefore anti-Christian.”²⁷⁷ Fuller concluded his discussion of the Bolshevik menace on a hysterical rhetorical pitch, invoking the ancient anti-Semitic trope of the Jewish murder of Christ:

Bolshevism is the last phase of the first crucifixion [Fuller wrote] and the first phase of the second; for, as in the first Christ was slain to appease the jealousy of Jehovah; so in this second is Christian culture to be destroyed in order that the spirit of Judaism may move over the formless and the void and establish its messianic empire. Such, then, is the Marxian revolution.²⁷⁸

In contrast to the existential threat posed by communism and Judaism (which he blithely conflated), Fuller discovered in fascism the only assurance of security and hope for mankind. Fascism, like communism, was an outgrowth of the new conditions created by industrial civilization. In particular, just as the earliest industrial developments related to steam power favored the “quantity” inherent to mass democracy and communism, the new development of the sciences of “life” (physiology, biology, bacteriology, psychology, and sociology), together with the chemical and electrical sciences favored the “quality” expressed by fascism.²⁷⁹ And this was not merely the “quality of things,” but rather “quality of human actions and the understanding of the qualities of the human

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 133.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 134.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 138.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 129.

mind and soul.”²⁸⁰ Fascism and National Socialism, in fact, had their origin in this *scientific* revolution; their roots ran deep “into the scientific developments of the nineteenth century, and are to be discovered more particularly in the revolt of, what may be called, the organic sciences against the conditions established by Financial Democracy, and not so much in that of the inorganic sciences (coal, steam, iron, mechanics) against those fostered by Industrial Democracy.”²⁸¹ The changes wrought by the latest developments of science and technology would before long necessitate a new economic and political order. “As society was changed by intellectualized science,” Fuller explained, “it followed that a time would come when, not only the economic but the political system would have to follow suit.”²⁸²

The event that made possible the emergence of the “new politics” of autocracy, truth, impartiality and order was, of course, the First World War – the consummation of the epoch of war and the logical consequence of the dependence of international finance on the use of “horde armies.” Although, as Fuller explained, “in the minds of the democratic majorities, this war was fought to make the world safe for democracy, occultly it was fought to liberate a rising scientific civilization from the dead weight of democratic inertia.”²⁸³ The First World War had been a struggle between the forces of science and the forces of reaction, a conflict between the “scientific method and the natural evolutionary method of trial and error leading to blind and compulsory change: of thought against tradition and of reality against myth.”²⁸⁴ During the war, developments in military technology had revealed the new political tendency of scientific thought:

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 129.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 138.

²⁸² Ibid., 130

²⁸³ Ibid., 130.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 139.

“eventually... science took autocratic control; aeroplanes, tanks, lethal gas, and a host of scientific appliances proving beyond doubt that God no longer sides with the bigger battalions, but with the more cunning brains.”²⁸⁵ As science and technology had demonstrated, during the First World War, that leadership should fall to the minority with the “more cunning brains” – essentially a technocratic elite – the emergence of a political expression appropriate to this new reality became inevitable. The result was the birth of Fascism and National Socialism, political movements that Fuller described, drawing on analysis of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, as “‘pseudomorphs’: that is, realities working in and trying to cast off the myths which encumber them.”²⁸⁶ The “myths” to which Fuller referred, naturally, were those of liberalism and mass democracy.

But what exactly was this new political form, which would harmonize government with the reality of modern science? In *The First of the League Wars*, Fuller went into considerable detail in his description of so-called “scientific government.” The object of government was, according to Fuller, “to establish order in the relationships between men, or, in other words... [to maintain] peace within nations and between nations.”²⁸⁷ This would mean necessarily government by minority, for majorities were by their very nature unfit for rule. “There is no fixed rule in government,” he wrote, “except that authority can never reside in the greater number, only in quality of mind, which by nature belongs to the lesser number – the minority of the people.”²⁸⁸ But to achieve true minority rule was an exceedingly difficult task. The great challenge of the day, Fuller explained, was “to find wisdom, which takes into consideration the fact that majorities

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 139.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 271.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 271.

are predominantly irrational.”²⁸⁹ To achieve this, Fuller suggested rather obscurely that reason “must be fortified, not by unreason but by super-reason – something which both the reasoning and unreasoning automatically accept, because it stands beyond argument.”²⁹⁰ What that would mean in practice was that political power should be supported by a kind of secular religiosity: as he wrote, “a government to be stable must be possessed of a religious spirit, a belief in its own righteousness, and a sense of self-sacrifice which compels it to place faith in itself above all desires for peace or war.”²⁹¹ Although such an end appeared almost impossible, Fuller suggested that certain political developments since 1918 were evidence that a government with “super-rational” force might be created. “I see it crudely springing up in Russia, Italy, and Germany,” he wrote. “In these countries and others politics have been spiritualized in varying degrees, and all systems which are spiritualized are in essence super-rational, for they are endowed with a wonder which magnetizes the thinking and the unthinking.”²⁹² The countries which best exhibited the new spiritualized and “super-rational” politics were for Fuller, naturally, the fascist states. Communism suffered from the inherent flaw that class antagonism was its very “life blood.” For fascism, on the other hand, class struggle was “its deadliest disease.”²⁹³

The instrument through which fascism achieved this creative goal of remaking society for the common good was the “corporate state” – what Fuller termed the “Threefold State.” This notion harkened back to Fuller’s abortive attempt to distill the art of war into a scientific discipline in *The Foundations of the Science of War* (1926). In

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 274.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 274.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 274.

²⁹² Ibid., 274-5.

²⁹³ Ibid., 280.

that work, he had argued that a “threefold order” was the underlying basis of military thought. This pseudo-mystical concept seems to have been one of Fuller’s pet notions. In a negative review of *The Foundations of the Science of War*, Brigadier General J. E. Edmonds had mocked Fuller’s obsession with the “threefold order,” writing that, as Fuller believed that we conceived of nature as “earth, water and air, and mankind as men, women and children...besides we might add, wearing ‘coat trousers and boots’ and using ‘knife, fork and spoon.’”²⁹⁴ Despite its negative reception, however, Fuller returned to the “threefold order,” applying the dubious concept in this case to political science. Human government should be “threefold” because man, in Fuller’s mystical conception, was “psychologically threefold,” being simultaneously irrational, rational and super-rational.²⁹⁵ Only a government which was organized to recognize this threefold division and to reconcile it could achieve true stability. What exactly the “Threefold State” would entail in practice is illustrated by Fuller’s invocation of the historical organization of British society.

For centuries, and more especially so during the feudal age, our system of government was threefold and markedly what to-day would be called Fascist. Under the direction of the King the people were governed by a threefold instrument: the Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal, and the Commons. In other words, by a Cultural Chamber, a Political Chamber, and an Economic Chamber, which a little later on I will show are the constituent parts of the Corporate State.²⁹⁶

The “corporate state” as envisioned by Mosley’s movement was therefore the ideal government for Britain, being based upon sound rational and scientific principles while simultaneously providing the near-religious spiritualism necessary to “magnetize” the masses. The “corporate state” would moreover provide Britain with the only true defense against the shock of modern “totalitarian warfare”; only a government with the national

²⁹⁴ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, 84.

²⁹⁵ Fuller, *The First of the League Wars*, 278.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 282-3.

discipline and integration promised by the “corporate state” could withstand an assault directed against the civil will. Fuller’s discussion of the “corporate state” is itself not particularly original, being for the most part a recapitulation of ideas that Mosley and other members of the BUF (particularly Alexander Raven Thomson) had adapted from Italian fascism. The discussion of the “corporate state” in *The First of the League Wars* is most notable for Fuller’s attempt to explain the British Union program in his own mystical terms. Fuller apparently believed that the political program proposed by Mosley’s movement would provide the answer to man’s spiritual and material needs. The neat way in which Fuller integrated his military and mystical thought with this particular political philosophy sheds considerable light on his decision to embrace fascism. Fascism represented to Fuller the consummation of the philosophy that he had developed over the course of his life.

Although Mosley’s movement seemed very far from power in 1936, Fuller was sanguine about its chances of success in the long term. The key for Fuller was that British fascism take on a particularly British form – an idea that recalls his earlier recommendation to Mosley that “foreign elements” be excised from the BUF. This would be relatively easy to achieve for, as he argued, fascism was in a real sense a “universal” creed. Although fascism took on a national form in different nations, “by selecting the common good as its object it is also a potential universal movement.”²⁹⁷ British fascism did not have to be an exact duplicate of the continental movements that Fuller had found disappointing. Although British fascism resembled the flawed Italian form of fascism in particular, this was only on the level of appearances: “As in its political form this spirit [fascism] first manifested itself in Italy, it is for this reason that outwardly British

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 298.

Fascism resembles Italian...”²⁹⁸ In fact, British fascism was in the process of creating something altogether new and unique to Britain. “...inwardly,” Fuller wrote, “it is more flexible [than Italian Fascism] and to-day it is rapidly working out a dialectic which answers to British character, feelings, and traditions; in short, it is in the process of adapting a new revolutionary politics to an old conservative people.”²⁹⁹ This was precisely the lesson that Fuller had learned from his close exposure to Italian fascism. Fascism itself was not the problem, but it was necessary that the fascist movement in Britain be ideologically suited to the conditions of British society. This being the case, Fuller believed that fascism could quite easily be established in Britain. “My own opinion,” he wrote, “is that if in the near future a strong left-wing government is returned to power, and should its members commit the egregious blunder of supposing that the strength of Great Britain lies in its proletariat, then the chances are that it will be swept out of office by a spontaneous Fascist movement, *not Italian or German, but British in character.*”³⁰⁰ It seemed to Fuller that this change would not be entirely unwelcome to the majority of Britons. The British certainly exhibited an outward hostility to fascism, but this was not deep seated. It was rather due to the “ceaseless propaganda mainly on the part of the financial interests in this country and the organs they control in order to maintain unchallenged their Empire of Money.”³⁰¹ At heart, he argued, “we have always been and still are an aristocratic people.”³⁰² In short, a people receptive to fascism. “No,” Fuller declared, “I do not believe that the people as a whole are hostile to the Fascist

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 286.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 286.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 285 [Italics are my own].

³⁰¹ Ibid., 282.

³⁰² Ibid., 282.

system.”³⁰³ If fascism were only presented in what Fuller considered to be an appropriately British guise, in a form adapted to the British character, it would be certain not only of political success but of widespread popular support.

But, as Fuller reminded us, *The First of the League Wars* “is not a book on Fascism, but a book on war...”³⁰⁴ The war in question, of course, was not really the *first* “league war” (the Italo-Ethiopian War), but the implied sequel. It is in his discussion of this *second*, putative, conflict, that Fuller reveals the extent of the evolution of his views on foreign fascism – and particularly his strongly positive view of Nazi Germany. The appearance of both communism and fascism had left the world divided along ideological lines. The nearest parallel to the state of international relations in the mid-1930s was Europe at the time of the Wars of Religion. With the emergence of fascism, “it came about that that Western democracy, hitherto faced only by Bolshevik Russia, as in the early Middle Ages Christendom had been faced by Islam, was politically rent in two; a rending as catastrophic to the unity of Europe as once had been Luther’s Reformation.”³⁰⁵ The League of Nations, by attempting to restrict the natural expansion of nations, made international conflict inevitable. According to Fuller’s Social Darwinist conception of international relations, vital and dynamic nations must have room to grow “naturally.” “Unless dynamic nations can peacefully expand,” Fuller wrote, “this cause must, as surely as day follows night, lead to international conflict.”³⁰⁶ The League of Nation’s very dedication to the preservation of peace was thus itself a source of antagonism that could lead to war – “...should the supporters of the League have their way, sooner or

³⁰³ Ibid., 283.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 293.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 3.

later a series of ‘religious’ wars will follow the Fascist Reformation, as surely and certainly as they followed the Protestant.”³⁰⁷ The proximate cause of this revival of the wars of religion would be Nazi Germany. Plagued by the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles and denied an outlet for expansion “not only physical but psychological” – something that would satisfy Germany’s need both to find a living space for its expanding population as well as to satisfy its national prestige – Germany was left with few options other than to go to war.³⁰⁸

Fuller’s comments on Germany reveal the shift in his thought towards greater support for Nazism. Hitler, according to Fuller, had set out to remake Germany – in fact, to recreate the Holy Roman Empire.³⁰⁹ The purpose of this was not territorial hegemony, but rather the milder objective of economic control. “When Hitler talks of German expansion,” Fuller wrote, “he obviously means economic; which in its turn means, not the invasion of political frontiers but the abandonment of tariff barriers.”³¹⁰ In the field of domestic policy, Hitler had revitalized Germany, achieving results that “border on the miraculous.”³¹¹ Fuller’s praise for the man himself was unbounded. Hitler appeared to him as “the moral noumenon of Germany, that thing-in-itself, that cause of German greatness.”³¹² His “ignorance and lack of superficial education” was a positive quality, which “freed him from past systems and theories and drove his impetuous spirit onwards towards the future.”³¹³ The future was, for Fuller, politically totalitarian. Hitler had realized that man “is moved by the grandeur of the national spirit, and, in order to sustain

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 177.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 178.

³¹¹ Ibid., 182.

³¹² Ibid., 145.

³¹³ Ibid., 145.

it he is willing to sacrifice personal liberty and life itself.”³¹⁴ He had moreover discovered the importance of discipline: “He saw that unity was impossible without national discipline; hence his regimentation of German life and his return to conscription.”³¹⁵ These developments were for Fuller wholly praiseworthy. Moreover, he reiterated his belief that the guiding principle of Nazi Germany was “common weal before private interest” – “and if this is not a sound moral maxim,” he asked, “and also a true democratic maxim to base national organization upon, what is?”³¹⁶ The reason for the violent persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany was simply this; Germany maintained an economic system according to which commerce was supposed to serve the nation, and the profit motive was superseded by the common welfare. “It is for this reason,” Fuller suggested, “that the Reich is opposed to international capitalism, and is consequently anti-Jewish.”³¹⁷ He moreover did not think that Hitler really desired war with the western democracies (although such a war was probably inevitable because of the misguided ideals of the League of Nations). Rather, Hitler was preparing for a life or death ideological struggle with the Soviet Union.³¹⁸ If a second “league war” were to come, however, the western democracies were certain to fare poorly unless they took the measures necessary to prepare for the prospect of “totalitarian warfare” – that is, unless they adopted totalitarian governments themselves.

By the time *The First of the League Wars* was published, it seemed to Fuller that the goal of developing an idiosyncratic British form of fascism was already well on its way towards being achieved. Certain fundamental reforms in the British Union of

³¹⁴ Ibid., 146.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 146.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 183.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 183.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 177.

Fascists, put into effect during the first half of 1936, probably account for the change in Fuller's attitude. The most obvious of these reforms was the movement's change in name from the British Union of Fascists to the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists, which was commonly reduced to simply "British Union." The decision to present the party publically as just the British Union had the effect of deemphasizing the organization's allegiance to the foreign-sounding "fascism." "National Socialism," in contrast, could be explained much more easily to an English-speaking audience, drawing as it did upon familiar political concepts.

This superficial change accompanied more significant developments in British fascist ideology, which helped to bring the party's orientation and objectives into line with Fuller's prescriptions. In *Fascism – 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (1936), Oswald Mosley presented an account of the British Union's program that seemed to answer Fuller's call for a variety of fascism that was fitted to the particular political and social conditions in Britain. The short book stressed, for instance, that the British Union would seek power "by legal and constitutional means" rather than by violent revolution (or counter-revolution).³¹⁹ More to the point, Mosley stated clearly that fascism in Britain would be different from either Italian or German fascism because "they are Italian or German and...we are British. From this all other differences follow."³²⁰ The British Union was fundamentally a nationalist movement, and would not imitate any foreign model: "we seek to bring the creed of our age to Great Britain by British methods in accord with British character."³²¹ This formulation is lifted almost word-for-word from

³¹⁹ Oswald Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London: B.U.F. Publications Ltd., 1936), 12.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

Fuller's letter to Mosley, to say nothing of Fuller's discussion of British fascism in *The First of the League Wars*. Mosley's forceful statement of the independence of British fascism from any foreign model was just the sort of thing Fuller wanted to hear.

Late in the summer, Fuller resumed his correspondence with Mosley on a reconciliatory note, commenting sympathetically on the fascist leader's health and providing the address at which he could be reached during the month of August. Fuller further suggested that the two should arrange to meet socially if Mosley happened to be in the area.³²² By October, Fuller had resumed his active role in the British Union.

In November, Fuller decided to take the radical step of standing as the British Union candidate for the parliamentary constituency of Westminster St George's. His ill-fated candidacy was announced in *The Times* on November 19, alongside the names of eleven other prospective fascist parliamentarians.³²³ The decision to stand as a candidate for parliament in many respects represented the culmination of Fuller's vision for the British Union. He had long stressed the necessity for the British fascist movement to minimize its paramilitary roots and to seek power according to legal, constitutional means. By putting himself forward as a candidate, Fuller was making a substantive effort towards the achievement of this goal. The choice of districts was particularly significant. The Westminster St George's seat was held by then-War Secretary Duff Cooper. As by far the most illustrious soldier in the British Union, Fuller was no doubt the most qualified member of Mosley's party to contest Cooper's seat; the election could be fought on military questions on which Fuller was an undisputed expert. But although of symbolic significance, the decision to stand for parliament as a fascist was a source of

³²² J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, August 3, 1936, XOMN/B/7/4, Oswald Mosley Papers, University of Birmingham.

³²³ "Fascist Candidates for Parliament," *The Times*, November 19, 1936.

considerable hardship for Fuller. As Fuller later complained to Mosley, his writing was almost immediately barred from the mainstream press after his name went forward as a fascist candidate.³²⁴ The result was that his work as a journalist – by far his most lucrative source of income – was cut back significantly. He was forced to turn in consequence to writing books, “which is not only less profitable [than journalism], but...requires far more time.”³²⁵ To make up for his lost journalistic income, he was compelled to work not less than ten hours per day throughout much of 1937 – a demanding schedule for a man of man of 59.³²⁶

In the meantime, however, Fuller threw himself vigorously into his new occupation as a prospective politician. He made an effort to build up the British Union organization in Westminster St George’s, attending and frequently addressing the fortnightly meetings of the local fascist organization.³²⁷ The substance of Fuller’s platform as a parliamentary candidate can be found in a short pamphlet by Fuller entitled “What the British Union Has to Offer Britain.”³²⁸ Although undated, Fuller’s comment that the British Union had been active “for a little over four years now” places the pamphlet’s date of publication sometime shortly after October 1, 1936, the fourth anniversary of the founding of the BUF.³²⁹ A note in the foreword (written by British Union Director of Publicity, John Beckett) that Fuller was “about to visit Spain and General Franco” marks out March 1937 as the latest possible date of publication.³³⁰ The

³²⁴ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, March, 1938, box 2, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, *What the British Union Has to Offer Britain* (n.p., n.d.).

³²⁹ Ibid., 16.

³³⁰ Ibid., 1.

pamphlet therefore appeared around when Fuller had just launched his campaign as a parliamentary candidate.

Although “What the British Union has to Offer Britain” was for the most part a streamlined restatement of the British Union platform, the points that Fuller emphasized reflected his particular interpretation of British fascist ideology. In particular, the case for fascism that Fuller put forward in “What the British Union Has to Offer Britain” drew very heavily on the lessons that he had learned as a result of his experiences in Germany and Italy – that is, what worked in those countries would not necessarily work in Britain. British fascism, he emphasized, would not imitate any foreign model but would rather be unique. To suggest that the British Union would seek to copy Italian or German fascism, Fuller asserted, “is to say what is impossible.”³³¹ Fascism had taken a violent form in Germany and Italy “because conditions compelled it to do so.”³³² Germany, for example, had been sent reeling by military defeat and economic collapse. Britain faced altogether different challenges. It therefore followed that “our application of the principles of Fascism differ [sic] radically.”³³³ The principle way in which the British Union’s “application of the principles of Fascism” might be distinguished that of its continental forebears was its dedication to a legal and non-violent path to power, and its intention to establish a relatively “moderate” dictatorship – both features that Fuller considered to be in keeping with the traditions of British politics and society. Oswald Mosley had, Fuller suggested, “[tested] out the British and German systems in order to discover how far their principles could be adapted to the British character.”³³⁴ He had in consequence developed

³³¹ Ibid., 5.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., 7.

an ideology and program that would suit the British people, who were – in contrast to the Germans and the Italians – “constitutionally minded” and negatively disposed to “upheavals and sudden changes.”³³⁵ The hypothetical British Union government that Fuller described would assume “a form very different from any Continental analogy and peculiarly British in character.”³³⁶ It is a testament to how much the British Union had evolved (at least in Fuller’s estimation) throughout 1936, that what he had recommended in a private letter to Mosley in February could by the end of the year be declared openly as the party’s platform by a British Union parliamentary candidate. The vision of fascism that Fuller offered to his prospective constituency had a distinctly British character.

VI. THE COMING OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Much of Fuller’s writing during the latter part of the 1930s was concerned with two related themes: the looming threat of war between Germany and Britain, and the urgent need for British rearmament. His journalism during this period dealt extensively with the diplomatic and military implications of German expansionism. His stance on the developing crisis was complicated by his manifest sympathy for Nazi Germany. Fuller recognized that many of his fellow countrymen – and indeed the European community as a whole – viewed Germany as a major threat to peace. As British attitudes towards Nazi Germany hardened in reaction to Hitler’s increasingly flagrant acts of aggression and provocation, Fuller consequently became a dedicated activist for the cause of Anglo-German friendship. Throughout his commentary on the various international crises that dominated political discussion between 1937 and 1939, he consistently argued that

³³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³³⁶ Ibid., 9.

Britain should acknowledge the supposed legitimacy of Nazi demands and accept the consequences of German expansion. Along with Neville Chamberlain, Fuller regarded it as absurd that the British people should consider going to war “because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.”³³⁷ It would be far better for Britain to recognize that Germany was merely setting right the iniquities of the Treaty of Versailles. For too long, the League of Nations had maintained restrictions that appeared to Fuller to violate Germany’s natural right to expansion and actualization. German aspirations did not in any way pose a threat to British interests. Rather than opposing German diplomacy at every turn, Fuller argued, the British government should rather seek to maintain friendly relations with Germany and forge an anti-communist block, which would stand in opposition to what he regarded as the much greater threat posed by the Soviet Union.

Even as he threw himself wholeheartedly into advocacy for friendship between Germany and Britain, however, Fuller continued to make the case for British rearmament. Despite his considerable sympathy for Nazi Germany, Fuller remained a British patriot. He hoped to ensure that Britain would be prepared for the next war, which he naturally believed would take on the character of “totalitarian warfare.” His recommendations for British rearmament thus straddled the line between advocacy for political and military reform. In order for Britain to be truly prepared for “totalitarian warfare,” Fuller argued, the British government would have to embrace totalitarian politics to a large degree. Only a fascist political system would provide Britain with the “national discipline” that would provide the only hope of security for the “civil will.” The true solution to Britain’s defense problem was therefore not merely the military panacea

³³⁷ Paul Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 235.

of mechanization, for which Fuller had argued incessantly throughout much of his career, but the rule of a British Union government.

This was the substance of the argument that Fuller put forward in *Towards Armageddon: The Defense Problem and Its Solution* (1937). This work, which Trythall described as Fuller's "last major polemic," consisted for the most part of the restatement of the ideas that Fuller had expressed in one form or another for almost twenty years.³³⁸ In particular, Fuller reiterated his standard discussion of "totalitarian warfare." Future wars would be characterized by lightening-fast airborne attacks against the "civil will." Due to the advancement of military technology, the next war could be won in a single blow. The implications of the new pace of warfare were that nations would have to maintain a near-constant state of military readiness. Britain would have to accept drastic reforms in order to achieve such a high level of vigilance. The foundations of defense included, according to Fuller's account, "the whole economic and moral structure of the country."³³⁹ In order for this level of defense coordination to be achieved, it appeared to Fuller to be necessary that "nothing other than the Government itself...be the coordinating instrument."³⁴⁰ It followed that the government would have to be changed considerably. As in *The First of the League Wars*, Fuller argued that totalitarian states such as Germany and Italy were much better organized to maintain the level of coordination necessary in order to wage "totalitarian warfare."³⁴¹ The success of fascism in Britain was therefore a defense imperative: a truly effective defensive organization in Britain was impossible, according to Fuller, "until the political system is radically

³³⁸ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 196

³³⁹ Fuller, *Towards Armageddon*, 28.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

changed.”³⁴² Britain’s foremost defense problem was her system of government: “...our defense defects are not inherent in the Services themselves, but in our political system,” Fuller wrote. “And, until this system is changed, though sheer force of circumstances whatever defense system we adopt, we shall be compelled to continue to muddle through.”³⁴³ Even if the British military were brought completely up-to-date – as Fuller had demanded throughout much of his career – it would still be inferior to that of totalitarian states, for the general population would still be vulnerable to attack, lacking the “totalitarian discipline” brought about by “totalitarian politics.”³⁴⁴

Fuller acknowledged that a future “totalitarian war” would most likely involve the continental fascist regimes, particularly Germany. He indicated his strong support for Hitler, repeating his usual praise for the German dictator’s statesmanship and dedication to peace. He also (correctly) predicted the peacetime strategy of expansion through diplomatic and military intimidation that Hitler would pursue over the next few years, prophesying that the dictator would “cash in on every crisis by what may be called a ‘passive’ attack; in other words, whenever a crisis arises and the democratic nations are thrown into paroxysms of emotionalism, to make so warlike a grimace that he will deflate them and gain what he is seeking without firing a shot.”³⁴⁵ A “second league war” was nevertheless ultimately likely, and would probably emerge from an international economic crisis.³⁴⁶ This war would be a clash “not between nations, but between civilizations,”³⁴⁷ and would “decide for an age whether money-making or life-making,

³⁴² Ibid., 29.

³⁴³ Ibid., 35-6.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 52.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 55.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 227-8.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 227.

whether materialism or spirituality is to be master of Western civilization.”³⁴⁸ According to Fuller’s view, there were only three possible outcomes to such a war: if it ended in a draw (between Germany and her opponents), a resumption of the war would ultimately be inevitable; if Germany won, her enemies would be overcome either by fascist or communist revolutions; if Germany lost, the inevitable result would be the triumph of communism, “for if National Socialism goes under what other philosophy can replace it?”³⁴⁹ It seemed to Fuller to be absolutely inconceivable that a “totalitarian” war involving Germany could result in a victory for democracy. Such a result was impossible according to Fuller’s conception of the relationship between scientific development and political philosophy. “To imagine that revolution will take on a conventional democratic form,” Fuller declared, “is to think in terms which are already nearly a hundred years out of date.”³⁵⁰ Fuller’s comments on the outcome of a potential European war shed considerable light on his subsequent activism in favor of peace between Germany and Britain. Believing that a German defeat in a second Great War would result in a victory for communism, he regarded such a war as a disaster to be avoided by any means necessary.

Towards the end of 1937, the British government began a series of military reforms that won Fuller’s cautious approval. In December, he lauded the decision of Leslie Hore-Belisha, the Secretary of State for War – who was at that time advised unofficially by Fuller’s friend and fellow advocate for mechanization, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart – to replace the leadership of the Army Council, which had been dominated by older generals who were in the “last lap” of their military service, with a group of

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 229.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 238.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 238.

significantly younger officers.³⁵¹ This represented an important step towards military reform for, as Fuller had long argued, youthful leadership was essential to effective military organization. He suggested that this reform would be the first of many under the competent direction of “our young Secretary of State for War.”³⁵² By March 1938, Fuller was sufficiently impressed with Britain’s progress towards rearmament that he acknowledged, in a letter to Mosley, that the basic issue on which his parliamentary campaign in Westminster St George’s was being fought had been effectively answered. “When I agreed to my name going forward [as a candidate for parliament] Duff Cooper was Secretary of State for War and the defenses of this country were in a perilous condition,” Fuller wrote. “Since then he has left the War Office, and the vast rearmament scheme, now in progress, has knocked the main props from under my feet; for my sole value as a prospective candidate is my knowledge of the defense question.”³⁵³ This was a remarkable admission, for the changes in British defense policy had been made under the leadership of a Jewish Secretary of State.

Fuller thus brought his abortive foray into parliamentary politics to a close. In addition to the new program of rearmament, he suggested that a number of other factors contributed to make his campaign unviable. He was too old to muster the effort necessary to lead a successful campaign, for “what is wanted is a younger man than myself and one who can give far more time to the work than I can.”³⁵⁴ He felt that he had not made sufficient progress towards the creation of a significant base of constituents. He had hoped to double the British Union membership in Westminster Saint Georges every

³⁵¹ J. F. C. Fuller, “The Army Council Was Born to Stop Muddle,” *The Daily Mail*, December 3, 1937, 7.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ J. F. C. Fuller to Oswald Mosley, March, 1938, box 2, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

twelve months, an objective that appeared to be necessary if he was to have any hope of saving his deposit. This goal was nevertheless very far from being met “for the membership has remained approximately what it was when I began.”³⁵⁵ Fuller moreover criticized the British Union’s overall electoral strategy. The experience of campaigning had only confirmed his belief that the “surest road to success does not lie in a frontal attack on all constituencies, but solely in a carefully prepared flank attack on a selected number, namely the distressed areas – industrial and agricultural.”³⁵⁶ The British Union had little hope of gaining a foothold of parliament – what Fuller had always regarded as British fascist movement’s best route to power – if it continued to attempt to contest a large number of parliamentary constituencies simultaneously. “It is the bottom constituencies which will put the Movement into power,” Fuller declared, “therefore let us concentrate on them.”³⁵⁷ Mosley wrote a brief letter in reply, thanking Fuller for his hard work and agreeing that his candidacy had been undermined by Duff Cooper’s departure from the position of Secretary of State for War. He stated that Fuller would be welcome to stand as a British Union candidate in the future, if he so desired. He moreover acknowledged the validity of Fuller’s criticism of the British Union electoral strategy. “I agree with you in the principle of concentration on the most likely constituencies,” he wrote. “We should only extend our attack as funds became ample – which is not a common condition in a Fascist Movement!”³⁵⁸

By withdrawing from his parliamentary candidacy, Fuller ended the period of his most active participation in the British Union of Fascists. This was nevertheless by no

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Oswald Mosley to J. F. C. Fuller, March, 10, 1938, box 2, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

means the end of Fuller's involvement with the British far right. In the last year and a half before the beginning of the Second World War, Fuller was in fact increasingly involved in the most extreme fringe of British right wing politics. He became closely associating with high profile efforts to foster friendship between Britain and Nazi Germany just as Hitler's regime was beginning to be widely recognized as a major threat to civilization. While Fuller continued his association with the British Union to some extent, writing a number of articles for British Union journals such as *Action*, his political activities during the last years of the 1930s were most of all connected with the most radical British anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi organizations. Foremost among these was the Nordic League, a shadowy organization that was originally established in 1937 as an outgrowth of the White Knights of Britain (which Richard Thurlow described as a "British 1930s version of the Ku Klux Klan").³⁵⁹ This organization maintained a low profile throughout much of its existence, and was heavily influenced by Archibald Maule Ramsay, a major figure on the British far right.³⁶⁰ Throughout 1938 its activities were mainly confined to secret meetings. It emerged briefly in 1939, holding "several public meetings in London of a pro-nazi or pro-appeasement character."³⁶¹ The Nordic League's most prominent characteristic was its extreme anti-Semitism, which was expressed through the toast "P.J." or "Perish Judah."³⁶² The membership, which included such far-right luminaries as William Joyce and A. K. Chesterton, was known to promote a "genocidal solution to the so-called Jewish question..."³⁶³ The Nordic League was regarded by the British Security

³⁵⁹ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 143; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 80-81.

³⁶⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 143.

³⁶¹ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 81.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 82.

Service as a seditious body.³⁶⁴ Even Oswald Mosley considered the organization to be too extreme, refusing to involve himself or the British Union with the Nordic League.³⁶⁵ In Thomas Linehan's expression, the Nordic League was "probably the most fanatical and malevolent of the late 1930s pro-Nazi anti-war groups."³⁶⁶ Fuller's involvement with such an organization is indicative of the extent of his pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic sentiment during the final years of the 1930s.

Aside from the Nordic League, Fuller was involved in several other pro-Nazi and anti-war groups. These organizations included the Link, the membership of which consisted of a wide range of German sympathizers, from "the most innocent of provincial pro-Germanists to convinced pro-Nazis of a fairly disquieting kind."³⁶⁷ Fuller became most active in the Link in 1939, speaking before the Central London division – "the most clearly pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic branch" – on several occasions.³⁶⁸ Later in 1939, Fuller became involved with the efforts by the Conservative MP, Lieutenant Colonel J. T. C. Moore-Brabazon, to coordinate advocacy for peace between Britain and Germany.³⁶⁹ Fuller was also associated with the British Council Against European Commitments, a minor pro-peace organization whose membership included a number of people were associated with the BUF. Fuller's participation in these various organizations is difficult to assess. The history of the most extreme groups, particularly the Nordic League, is shrouded in secrecy. Documentation of their activities is relatively scarce, what little there is coming primarily from British Special Branch observation.³⁷⁰ Fuller,

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 80-81.

³⁶⁶ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 144.

³⁶⁷ Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 307.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 314.

³⁶⁹ Pugh, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts!", 279.

³⁷⁰ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 78.

unsurprisingly, left little record of his own participation in most of these groups. All that can be said with real certainty is that J. F. C. Fuller was a member of a number of the most extreme pro-Nazi organizations in Britain on the eve of the Second World War.

Fuller's public activities – and his published writing in particular – nevertheless provide extensive evidence for his pro-Nazi and pro-peace views on the eve of the Second World War. In January 1938, he presented an overview of his thoughts on international affairs in an article entitled, “On What Should Our Foreign Policy Be Based?”³⁷¹ He criticized Britain's established foreign policy heavily, arguing that “Baldwinism” had led to the unfortunate state of affairs in which much of the world was hostile to the British government. Fuller argued that Britain should avoid taking sides “in a world divided into irremovable obstacles and irresistible forces.”³⁷² The British government needed to recognize the vulnerability of the empire's globe-spanning “Imperial backbone.” Britain should at all costs avoid antagonizing those nations – including Japan, Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the USA – that were capable of posing the most direct threat to the integrity of the British Empire. In the case of Germany specifically, Fuller recommended that Britain pursue a policy of appeasement, arguing that Britain should acquiesce to Hitler's demand for the return of Germany's former colonies.³⁷³ In March, Fuller came out firmly in favor of appeasement, applauding the German annexation of Austria as a decisive blow against the international order represented by the League of Nations.³⁷⁴ In light of the new strategic situation in the

³⁷¹ J. F. C. Fuller, “On What Should Our Foreign Policy Be Based?” *Action*, January 29, 1938, 7.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ J. F. C. Fuller, “Strategy, the Anschluss and Mr. Eden,” *Action*, March 12, 1938, 7.

Mediterranean created by the Anschluss, Fuller recommended that Britain pursue friendship with Italy and Germany.³⁷⁵

Later in the spring, Fuller commented on the developing Czechoslovakian crisis, speculating that Britain's defensive agreement with France was "in my opinion, the first definite step taken since the signing of the peace treaties in 1919, towards war..."³⁷⁶

Fuller feared that this move, taken at the same time as Germany was beginning to put intensive pressure on Czechoslovakia over the Sudeten question, would provoke a resurgence of the German fears of strategic encirclement which had precipitated the First World War.³⁷⁷ In spite of Hore-Belisha's military reforms, Fuller believed that Britain was still unprepared for war. He therefore recommended that Chamberlain's government accept the German demands in Czechoslovakia, as failure to do so could very easily lead to military catastrophe. In the wake of the Munich Agreement in October, Fuller praised the Chamberlain's response to the Czechoslovakian crisis, suggesting that a general European war had only narrowly been avoided.³⁷⁸ The Munich Agreement had been the product of the collective common sense of the "silent majority" of the British, French, German and Italian peoples. By handing the Sudetenland over to Hitler, the negotiators had "heroically and wisely extinguished the flames of war, and so prevented the European nations tearing themselves to pieces like a pack of starving wolves."³⁷⁹ If the negotiations had failed, war would have meant disaster for both Britain and France – Germany, fighting alongside Italy, would probably have achieved "a second Sedan on a

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ J. F. C. Fuller, "Towards the Next World War? Czechoslovakian Fly in the Peace Salve," *The Pioneer*, May 12, 1938, 4.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, "If War Had Come..." *Woman's National Newspaper*, October 13, 1938, 1.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

gigantic scale.”³⁸⁰ In order to ensure that such an outcome would not result from a future conflict, Britain would have to embrace totalitarian political organization, not in imitation of Italy or Germany “but in our own British way...”³⁸¹

During the early months of 1939 it became increasingly clear that the Munich Agreement had not extinguished the “flames of war” altogether. In the aftermath of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, British public opinion turned decisively against appeasement.³⁸² By the end of March, Neville Chamberlain had announced that Britain would guarantee the independence of Poland, which by then appeared to be the next target for German expansion.³⁸³ The British government’s policy of appeasement was brought effectively to an end. Throughout this period, J. F. C. Fuller’s efforts to promote friendship between Germany and Britain intensified. His activism in favor of peace between Britain and Germany was put to effective use by the Nazi regime. Fuller’s comments on international affairs were quoted with approval in the *Völkischer Beobachter* as early as September 1938.³⁸⁴ In February 1939, Fuller travelled to Berlin, sitting for an interview with a German reporter during his stay in the Kaiserhof Hotel.³⁸⁵ The resulting article appeared on the front page of *B. Z. am Mittag*. Fuller expressed sympathy with Hitler’s efforts to overturn the international order forged in the aftermath of the First World War, describing himself “als einen der ersten Angreifer gegen

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 243.

³⁸³ Ibid 244.

³⁸⁴ “Historische Beispiele der letzten zwanzig Jahre,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 11, 1938, 3.

³⁸⁵ “General Fuller über Demokratie als „Pluto-Kanaille“ und ihre Krise,” *B. Z. am Mittag*, February 4, 1939, 1.

Versailles.”³⁸⁶ War between Germany and Britain, he insisted, should be avoided at all costs.³⁸⁷

In April, Fuller’s ceaseless advocacy on behalf of Anglo-German friendship earned him an invitation to Hitler’s fiftieth birthday celebration in Berlin. Fuller was one of only two Britons who appeared as official guests of the German dictator. His excursion to Germany was announced in *The Times* on April 19, the article noting that Fuller’s “views on democratic institutions have of late received prominent and favorable notice in the German press...”³⁸⁸ On April 20, Fuller observed the German military parade. The *News Review* described the scene:

Face to face with the Fuehrer, though separated from him by the sixty-yards-wide Avenue of Triumph, sat explosive old English warrior Major-General John Frederick Charles Fuller. Wearing a plain grey top-hat among the respondent [sic] uniforms of his fellow-guests, he looked somewhat like a cheeky mouse on a gaudy-hued patchwork quilt...At present Major-General Fuller is distinguished by his Polish wife Sonia, his Poona moustache, and his cosmopolitan collection of decorations, including the DSO, Légion d’Honneur and Order of Leopold of Belgium.³⁸⁹

According to Fuller’s account, he met with Hitler shortly after the parade: “He walked down the line, and when he came opposite to me he shook me by the hand and said: ‘I hope you were pleased with your children?’ To which I answered: ‘Your Excellency, they have grown up so quickly that I no longer recognize them’, which was true.”³⁹⁰

A few days later, *The Times* published a short letter by Fuller in which he stated the essence of his case for fascism and for peace in condensed form.³⁹¹ Denying that he was opposed to democracy, Fuller declared that he was really only opposed to

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ “Herr Hitler’s Birthday,” *The Times*, April 19, 1939.

³⁸⁹ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 204

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 205.

³⁹¹ “General Fuller and Democracy,” *The Times*, April 27, 1939.

Bolshevism and what he termed “pluto-mobocracy.”³⁹² He acknowledged that he was frequently called a fascist, stating that he had no objection to that epithet “when ‘British’ is placed before this at present popular expression of abuse...”³⁹³ He stated his belief that a “new political idea, expressing itself as Fascism, National Socialism, &c., is...inevitable.”³⁹⁴ It was in consequence necessary that Britain “swim with the out-flowing tide of this great political change, or else be wrecked on the shore of self-fashioned ruin.”³⁹⁵ He furthermore expressed his concern that Britain would be led into a new war in alliance with the Soviet Union, “in my opinion the ultimate end of all pluto-mobocracies.”³⁹⁶ Fuller hoped above all that Britain would not be forced into a war on the side of the Soviet Union against the continental fascist states. “Democrat or Fascist,” Fuller wrote, “we are a God-fearing people, and at least several millions of us are still to be found who are revolted by the idea of an alliance with Anti-Christ.”³⁹⁷

Fuller made a last-ditch appeal for peace during the final months before the outbreak of the Second World War. In *Action*, he declared that it would be impossible for Britain to keep its guarantee to Poland, and that a war in defense of Polish independence would therefore be futile.³⁹⁸ Britain would have to undergo drastic political reorganization if it was to have any chance of victory. “If we are to beat Germany,” Fuller declared, “we have got to become Totalitarians, lock, stock and barrel...”³⁹⁹ If Britain and Germany went to war, Britain would be unlikely to survive an extended conflict. Britain was not yet economically self sufficient, and would thus be worn down

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, “Bellophobia,” *Action*, June 10, 1939, 11.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

over the course of a long war. It was therefore imperative that Britain do whatever possible to avoid a war with Germany.⁴⁰⁰ Fuller's last minute efforts to maintain peace were very rapidly overwhelmed by international events. The day after the German army crossed the Polish border, Fuller wrote an article condemning the folly of British statesmanship. Britain, he declared, was entering an unwinnable war for an unworthy cause: "We are risking our pants for a trouser button."⁴⁰¹

VII. CONCLUSION

Fuller's political activities, like those of the British fascist movement as a whole, continued on ineffectually throughout the duration of the Phony War (September 1939 – May 1940). On September 27, he met with the CIGS, General Ironside, who indicated that Fuller was being seriously considered for the position of Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Fuller's open political commitments however proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to his reemployment at the War Office, and the offer was subsequently withdrawn.⁴⁰² Fuller still hoped that Germany and Britain could reach an honorable peace agreement that would leave the British Empire intact and the European continent mostly unscathed. Like Mosley himself, Fuller persisted in his belief that it was possible to be both a British fascist and a British patriot. In his published commentary on the war, Fuller retained his sympathetic view of Nazi Germany to a significant degree. His treatment of Hitler's war effort avoided any hint of moral condemnation. In November 1939, he went so far as to write a brief article in which he attempted to dismiss the lurid rumors then circulating about the treatment of Jewish prisoners in German

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ J. F. C. Fuller, "Britons Think Again," *Action*, September 2, 1939, 4.

⁴⁰² Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 215.

concentration camps. During his visit to Germany that February, he had apparently asked his guides on a whim if he could see one of the camps. He was consequently admitted to Sachsenhausen in Oranienburg, a site that neither the British Ambassador nor the British Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin had been allowed to visit. Stating that he had seen “practically every hut and building in the camp,” Fuller declared that everything had been “spotlessly clean and orderly.”⁴⁰³ The conditions were apparently quite comfortable, and the prisoners were well fed. He saw no conspicuous signs of ill-treatment. Nevertheless, he concluded his article on a profoundly ominous note, describing the prisoners that he had seen as deformed and misshapen. “Therefore,” he wrote, “I could not help feeling that, whether these concentration camps are barbarous or not, a civilization which produces such creatures [as the prisoners] is one to be fought against rather than to be fought for.”⁴⁰⁴

The events of the following summer made it clear that there could be no settlement between Britain and Germany. The British Union continued to advocate for peace throughout the spring, even enjoying a modest increase in popularity.⁴⁰⁵ In the chaotic weeks following the German invasion of France, however, Winston Churchill’s newly-inaugurated government took decisive steps to curtail the fascist movement in Britain. The instrument by which this was achieved was the Emergency Powers Act, which had been introduced in September 1939. According to the original wording of the act, the Home Secretary was empowered to detain “anyone he had reason to suspect of hostile associations or involvement in ‘acts prejudicial to public safety or the defense of

⁴⁰³ J. F. C. Fuller, “German Concentration Camps,” *Truth*, November 24, 1939, 3.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Pugh, “*Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*”, 297-99.

the realm.”⁴⁰⁶ In May 1940, the cabinet amended Regulation 18b of the Emergency Powers Act to allow for the “detention of members of organizations ‘subject to foreign influence or control’ or whose members ‘have or have had association with persons concerned in the government of, or sympathetic with the system of government of, any power with which His Majesty is at war.’”⁴⁰⁷ The British Union was immediately targeted, and nearly all of the prominent leaders of the organization were arrested along with a significant portion of the membership. J. F. C. Fuller was a singular exception. In spite of his open association with the BUF and his very high profile stance in support of Nazi Germany – not to mention his well-publicized meetings with Hitler and Mussolini – he was never detained. As Martin Pugh noted, “Fuller’s record in the BUF, as one of its candidates, as a contributor to fascist journals, and as a member of the Domvile-Ramsay circle during the war made him an obvious candidate for detainment under Regulation 18b.”⁴⁰⁸ Many were arrested for less. Fuller’s friend Captain B. H. Liddell Hart believed that Churchill had intervened personally on Fuller’s behalf.⁴⁰⁹ At any rate, Fuller seemed to recognize that he had been granted an unlikely (and undeserved) reprieve. He cut back the political tendency in his writing significantly, and confined his journalism to purely military topics throughout the remainder of the war. With the exception of a brief period in 1945 during which he publically opposed the trial of German military personnel as war criminals,⁴¹⁰ Fuller made a concerted effort to reinvent himself as a largely apolitical military historian after the Second World War.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 300.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 301-2.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 307.

⁴⁰⁹ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 217.

⁴¹⁰ Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in the Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 128.

Fuller's efforts to downplay his involvement in fascism were for the most part successful, at least in the short term. By the time of his death in 1966, his open identification with fascism during the 1930s was widely regarded as an aberration – a deplorable, but ultimately excusable lapse in judgment. Although historians of British fascism have since recognized the extent of his ideological commitment to fascism as well as the significance of his role in the BUF, the myth of the 1930s as a “lost decade” in Fuller's life has been remarkably persistent in much of the scholarship on J. F. C. Fuller himself. The deficiencies within the literature on J. F. C. Fuller, combined with the fragmentary nature of much of the evidence related to Fuller's activities during the 1930s, have in turn caused much of the writing about Fuller's participation in the British fascist movement to be incomplete and contradictory. This paper has attempted to set the record straight on Fuller's involvement with the British fascist movement, and thereby improve our understanding of one of the most important figures in the history both of British fascism and of the British military.

In A. J. Trythall's phrase, J. F. C. Fuller was an “intellectual fascist.”⁴¹¹ This description is at least partly accurate. Fuller aligned himself with Mosley and the British Union of Fascists because he believed that fascism was the political philosophy that gave expression to the scientific nature of the modern age. The BUF promised strong and decisive minority rule with a distinctly technocratic character. To Fuller, who in 1934 was thoroughly disillusioned with the military and political system that had failed to recognize the merits of his ideas – to say nothing of his own personal merits – Mosley's movement appeared to offer a way forward for Britain. Fuller threw himself wholeheartedly into fascist politics, attempting to reorganize the BUF into a legitimate

⁴¹¹ Trythall, *Boney Fuller*, 203.

parliamentary party as opposed to a violent paramilitary movement. He moreover strove to build up the intellectual content of British fascism, believing (characteristically) that a sound theoretical foundation was a necessary condition for effective political action. Experience with foreign fascism, particularly during the Italian-Ethiopian War, convinced him that what worked on the European continent would not necessarily work for the British people. Rather than abandoning fascism entirely, Fuller set about purging the British fascist movement of those foreign elements that he believed were unsuited to political conditions in Britain. In particular, he insisted that that Mosley's movement dedicate itself entirely to pursuing power through constitutional means. He ultimately demonstrated his belief in the parliamentary route to power by standing, albeit unsuccessfully, as a British Union candidate for parliament.

Fuller's faith in fascism was also strongly connected to his military thought, and indeed represented a synthesis of his political, military and even spiritual theories. Developments in military technology and tactics had produced a new style of warfare – what he termed “totalitarian warfare” – the outstanding feature of which was the terror bombing of civilian populations. If the morale of national populations could be attacked directly from the air, it was possible that states could be overwhelming and defeated within days or even hours. The protection of the “civil will” was therefore a defensive imperative, and Fuller was certain that fascism, through its emphasis on the order and discipline of the nation as a whole, provided the surest guarantee of security.

Although Fuller played an important role in the effort to remove foreign elements from British fascist ideology and to reorganize the BUF as a traditional parliamentary party, Brian Holden Reid's judgment that “the general contribution of Fuller to the BUF

was to try and enhance its respectability and not to create a British Nazi Party”⁴¹² requires some modification. Fuller was associated with some of the most radical elements on the British right wing. In his published writing, he declared his support for an extreme (if idiosyncratic) variety of conspiratorial anti-Semitism. He promoted the idea that the Jews were the true power behind communism in the Soviet Union – and indeed behind many ills throughout western history. Moreover, he became a strong supporter of Hitler and Nazi Germany, particularly during the latter part of the 1930s. While he never argued that Nazi ideology should be imported to Britain, he did campaign actively for Anglo-German friendship even up to the very beginning of the Second World War. Fuller’s efforts to prevent war with Germany led him to associate himself with some of the most radical organizations on the fringes of British politics, particularly the secretive Nordic League. The precise nature of Fuller’s participation in British fascism is therefore ambivalent. While on the one hand he was an important advocate for moderation and even intellectualization in the BUF, on the other hand he provided legitimacy and support to some of the most radical elements of the British fascist movement and of fascist ideology in general.

⁴¹² Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 203.

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