

XIII.—BIRTH OF BRITISH FASCISM

The New Party defeat would have broken the heart of a lesser man and smashed his career. Mosley rose from the wreckage of his hopes, not only unbroken, but stronger, more determined, more utterly devoted to his cause than ever in the past. While shouts of derision were being encountered on all sides, while the political and newspaper sub-men were debating whether he would be allowed to crawl back into the Conservative or Labour ranks, he was planning the greatest adventure of his career, and the boldest move in the history of British politics.

Mosley does not look upon the New Party experiment as a mistake, in the sense that Hitler regards his *Putsch* as a mistake. It was a disaster necessary to prove the utter bankruptcy of the Party method as a means to revitalise a great nation. He had seen how his "New Members' Association" of 1918, had been wafted out of existence by the simple magic of social intercourse and flattery. He had seen, to his infinite sorrow, how the same magic had destroyed the challenge of Labour, whose adherents had been dined and wined and corrupted by all the prizes that the old world had to offer. He had seen how even an honest man like Maxton had been cunningly robbed of his sting and danger by capitalism's device of painting him as a picturesque revolutionary and "good fellow." He now saw that any new Party that was merely political must attract to itself men brought up in the corrupt atmosphere of the old Parties—mostly political failures who had more talk than action to contribute, more egotism than service, more pomposity than guts. What was needed, he now realised with intense conviction, was a great new movement of new men and new methods—a surging, passionate movement, not of Party wrangling and expediency-mongering, but of spiritual rebirth. An instrument had to be forged for service to the people's will, an instrument of iron that would withstand the united resistance of old world violence, misrepresentations, lies and seductions, an instrument with which the British nation might cut through the tangled undergrowth of decadence, put an end to the system of plunder, and drive out humbug in order to face up to its problems with courage and build bravely for the future, instead of allowing financial brigands and political coxcombs to bring about its ruin by their incompetence and greed. It would be a move-

ment of the finest men and women of the British race, dedicated to long years of toil, sacrifice, and bitter disappointments, prepared and organised to face violence and even death, surrendering every fussy claim of the ego and bidding farewell to creature comforts in order that their nation and their Empire might survive and again take first place in the vanguard of the mighty peoples of the world.

Such a movement, being devotedly loyal to the Crown, would have to organise constitutionally in order to achieve political power. But that would be its only association with politics. Proud, hard, resistant, it would secure return of specially selected members to Parliament, not to become absorbed in its vitiating atmosphere, but to drive back into obscurity those whom the atmosphere had poisoned, to take charge of Britain and organise a great corporate system which would enable the people to rule in their own country and outlaw the brigands and the parasites who are its present masters and who have most damnably betrayed their masterdom. It would be a movement of discipline and relentless purpose, refusing all compromise with the old world, brooking no opposition in power save the constructive criticism of technicians as to ways and means, restoring to the land the heroic and historic principle of leadership, and marching forward to the attainment of a civilisation in keeping with the immortal spirit of the million men who died that Britain might live—and live to great purposes.

Thus entirely by his own thought and experience did Mosley arrive at the modern concept of life known as Fascism or National Socialism. He did not lose time blanching at names which the racketeers of financial democracy for years had heralded throughout Britain as synonymous with wickedness, and, indeed, with the grossest depravity. He went first to Italy and then to Germany—to learn.

In Italy, where there had been no such façade of respectability as that behind which vested interests cloak their aims in Britain, and where the people were less susceptible to the dope of meaningless catchwords, the system of Financial Democracy had broken down very much sooner—indeed, it occurred immediately after the War. In that breakdown the real nature and logic of democracy were shown up in all their inherent absurdities. Every political and economic faction fought for its own hand. Where labour was plentiful the employers emerged as petty tyrants; where it was scarce the Trade Union leaders assumed the tyrant's mantle and imposed impossible terms. There were vast strikes and lock-outs every day of the week. Trains arriving within even twelve hours of time were rare

phenomena. To post a letter was a gamble as to the likelihood of its receipt; to post a parcel was to make a certain present to someone other than the intended recipient. Gas and electricity and water were cut off whenever caprice might dictate; roads were dug up and left unrepaired for months; trams were abandoned in the street. The national life had almost ceased to function. There was fighting and bloodshed: ex-service-men were stoned; mob hysteria dominated the scene. Neither Reactionary nor Red had the courage to take charge and govern the mob. Italy was falling rapidly to pieces in a welter of democratic brigandage. Out of this agony of a great people's exhaustion emerged Fascism—the force that has integrated the modern world and saved it from collapse. Mussolini, one of the superlatively great leaders of mankind, organised his Black-shirts to take the Italian rabble by the throat and shake it into a sense of self-discipline and self-respect. In a few short years he had made of an effervescent, hysterical people one of the grandest nations on earth, and given it a system of government nobler and more realist than the world has ever known. Mosley came back from Italy tremendously impressed with the Italian leader and the spiritually regenerated Italian people. More than ever did he perceive the necessity for applying the Fascist solution to modern problems. This is how he described Fascism in an article which he wrote immediately after his return:—

“It is as remote from a stand-pat Conservatism as it is from the woolly headed Socialism or the destructive Communism which it overthrew. It brings to post-war politics a new creed and a new philosophy which cannot be tucked away in any of the old pigeon-holes of thought. On the one hand, that creed provides order, discipline, stability, authority, the ‘play in the team or get out’ attitude of the modern movement, the steady march of the young ranks of Fascism under determined leadership. All these things suggest what the old world calls the ‘Right,’ and would send the average English Socialist into a nightmare of hysteria which gibbered of ‘dictatorship’ and ‘tyranny.’ On the other hand, this new faith has produced constructive works to give the unemployed a job instead of the dole; the removal of landlords who are inefficient and the cultivation of their land by the State; the Labour Charter, which affirms that no man has rights unless he works; the Corporative Law, which gives the State not only the power of compulsory arbitration in labour disputes binding on both sides, but also unlimited power of interference and compulsion in cases of inefficient or anti-social use of capital. It has produced the greatest child-welfare system, which annually takes hundreds

of thousands to the mountains and to the sea; the Doppolavoro (after work) club system for all workers, which is one of the most spectacular achievements of the Fascist régime; the ‘political atmosphere,’ which is liable to remove an obstructive employer or capitalist, as well as the Communist agitator, for a ‘health holiday’ on certain salubrious islands known as the ‘Confini.’ All these things would send the old-fashioned English Conservative shivering for protection to the ‘respectable’ Socialism of Mr. Arthur Henderson. In fact, we are dealing with something new and not yet understood in this country. This Fascism challenges alike the ‘Right’ and the ‘Left’ of old-world politics. It has produced not only a new system of government, but also a new type of man, who differs from the politicians of the old world as men from another planet.”

Mosley saw working in Italy a method which effectively controlled every phase of economic and social life on behalf of the overriding interests of the nation as a whole—a method which made impossible the sectional rampages of Financial Democracy and allowed an entire nation to plan for its own future in an atmosphere of earnest and united effort, from which all the old dog-fights and games of bluff had been expelled. He was convinced that a British form of Fascism could achieve even greater results than those of Italian Fascism, first, because our vast Imperial resources would enable us, in a much quicker time, to insulate our system against the attacks of international finance, and, second, because the team spirit, which is the essence of Fascism, has been historically more an Anglo-Saxon than a Latin quality. He went also to Germany, where the the similar movement of National Socialism was emerging to transform a defeated and demoralised nation, with seven million unemployed, into a great, resurgent power, tackling its tremendous difficulties in a spirit of regained manhood and impelled to heights of collective achievement by the genius, sincerity, and heroic inspiration of Adolf Hitler.

Confirmed upon his course of action by all that he had seen abroad, Mosley made up his mind to lead a Fascist movement in Britain—a movement freely acknowledging its debt to Hitler and Mussolini, but, nevertheless, distinctively British in policy and method, concerned solely with the welfare and greatness of the British people. He was not blind to the appalling, monumental difficulties that such a movement would encounter in its bid for power. The British public knew nothing about the philosophy, constructive proposals or achievements of Fascism in other countries. Incessant propaganda had assured them that

it was nothing more than a tyranny, dolloping out castor-oil to its opponents and existing solely for the personal aggrandisement of Signor Mussolini. Apologists for a lawless capitalism and an equally chaotic democratic system assured the British people, standing on the verge of ruin, how lucky they were to retain their precious liberty of Press and platform, in charming compliment to the very agencies by which they were fooled and enslaved. All the poison of misrepresentation that had once been spread against Russia was now being spread against the creeds of Mussolini and Hitler, which were much more feared by the great interests than a Socialism that had been bought out of existence in Britain with blandishments and bribes of office and of power. The modern movement had been represented, not as a revolutionary force destroying the systems of economic exploitation and political humbug which were a feature of financial democracy in every part of the globe, but as the actual instrument of that exploitation and of that humbug. In other words, reactionary capitalism in Britain derided and sought to damage Fascism by alleging that it was the agent of capitalist reaction—a quaint distortion which, coming from such a source, should have aroused the suspicion of British workers, but which they swallowed whole. The effect of all this misrepresentation was not left out of Mosley's reckoning. He knew that all the old parties—Tory, Liberal, and Socialist—would join in a conspiracy to defend the corrupt democratic system, and bring the might of their joint forces to bear against a really challenging Fascist movement in this country. He knew that every small incident during the revolutionary phases of Fascism in other countries would be collected and used as evidence against him. He knew that there already existed a legend that because he had abandoned one useless party after another he was no more than a quick-jumping turn-coat without stability or principle, and that his adoption of Fascism would not be regarded in true perspective, as an inevitable culmination of the evolutionary trend of his life's thought and experience, but as further confirmation of what was supposed to be his reckless opportunism and love of the limelight, no matter in what grotesque posture it caught him. He knew the force of this legend, as he knew the towering dimensions of the mass hatred of Fascism which had already been fostered against any such contingency, and which would reach gigantic proportions as soon as he began to make headway with his cause. He foresaw that all the violence of all the hooligan elements created during a hundred years of unscrupulous industrialism would be flung against him, and that all the political and financial

elements would rejoice to see such a thing happening, and would, indeed, band themselves together to give it surreptitious support and even open vindication. He knew—the New Party experience had taught him—how colossal would be the effort needed to get his cause heard at all, let alone accepted, amidst the uproar and violence of uninformed multitudes taught to believe the absurdity that he came upon the scene as a monstrous tyrant to enslave them still further on behalf of the capitalists, whom they had already sufficient cause to loathe and fear. Mosley foresaw every one of these difficulties and he did not flinch. He had previously shown himself a man of immense courage. By launching his Fascist attack against the strongest conspiracy of vested powers in the world, he proved something more: he proved that his quality is as heroic as anything in the history of politics.

That the interests of the nation required (and more than ever require) the triumph of Fascist power and responsibility can be denied only by ignoring every single manifestation of its state and spirit. Slums and semi-slums everywhere. Malnutrition on a gigantic scale, while food is destroyed to keep up the profits of capitalism. Millions unemployed while the people cry aloud for the products of their labour. Usury and every other form of parasitism feeding upon the decay of a great people. Election promises made only to be broken, to serve the sordid little careers of political nincompoops. Distraction from the contemplation of internal grievances by a foreign policy interfering in the affairs of stronger and better governed nations, and alternately inviting disastrous wars and humiliating the British name by crawling away from them by the skin of Baldwin's teeth and the outer fringe of Eden's dashing moustache. Government too weary, too cowardly, and too incompetent to govern. Criminal neglect of defence. A mighty Empire sliding adrift where it is not actually given away. Absolute lack of any policy for an economic position which must gravely deteriorate as boom periods shorten and periods of depression lengthen in the final breakdown of capitalism. These are only a few of the symptoms indicating the nation's sickness, and they are not even the most serious symptoms.

Still more important is the degradation of all values to what are known in the theatre as box-office values. After the War a debased commercial civilisation reached its apotheosis in a riot of vulgarity and spoliation. Financial tyranny of the worst kind was exerted to force down and destroy all previous standards of commercial morality. The business ethic of giving value for money disappeared over the horizon into the limbo of lost decencies. Pride in the product gave way to the

obsession of profit. Goods in hundreds of instances were specially constructed to break easily or soon wear out in order that there might be orders for replacement. The scandal of Local Government became steadily worse. The fair face of England wore the aspect of a progressive ugly rash of jerry-building, so that builders might make extra profits by scamping their jobs. The noble English theatre became the happy hunting ground of speculative vulgarians and Nancies degrading public taste to levels upon which they would find no difficulty in supplying the demand that they themselves created. The cinema—a cultural medium of the first importance—was captured by American and Polish Jew financiers and made to contribute to the general demoralisation of the people. It either neglected or befouled the English scene, so full of pageantry and memories of colourful adventure and daring, to superimpose a bastardised Judaic-American pseudo-culture upon a nation with a superb cultural inheritance of its own. The Press, with its extraordinary opportunities for high service to Britain, threw away that opportunity in order to exploit commercial values and political intrigues, making itself the disseminator of all that is sensational and vicious instead of all that is fine in the life of man, and spurning to give honest news and enlightening opinion, because more commercial and political profit can be extracted from the concealment, distortion, and downright betrayal of the truth. The ether became full of bad jazz and the heart throbs of a-sexual crooners. Life took on the air of a kind of palais de danse. Art gave up the attempt to speak in praise of health, and suffered itself to become the vehicle of sickness and decay. Poetry no longer aspired to be the language of heroes, but the lisp of the spiritually diseased. Novelists refined emotions to the tenuity of a split hair, out-Freuding Freud. Biography set to work elevating the morale of an age of dwarfs by debunking all the heroes and great men of the past, leaving, for memory of them, only a series of nasty little smells. Everywhere else the worship of money or the exaltation of decay. C. E. M. Joad ran from "the cloven hoof of Fascism" to propose to the Oxford Union that under no circumstances should they fight for their King and Country, and the spiritually castrated young gentlemen agreed that they were much too exquisite to fight in defence of a country which gave them their undeserved advantages. Pacifism spread forth from these grand old centres of what had once been England's intellectual life to contaminate youth throughout the land and leave them unfit for the war which their exhibitionism and folly. The hard-faced men of Mos-

ley's first Parliament and their hard-faced friends have extended their dominion to cover the whole of the nation's economic life. The nation's intellectual and artistic life has passed into the keeping of she-men and he-women. Spiritually the victory has gone to the conscientious objectors who betrayed the nation's dead. In a world of resurgent nations Britain—once so splendid and vital—is plundered and debased and vitiated and surrendering every claim to health and greatness and dynamic life.

Throughout the post-War period Mosley was aware of all these things and saw in them a ghastly mockery of every fair hope for Britain which had helped so many men to die for her. But because Fascism undertakes responsibility for the spiritual health of the nation, no less than for the sane ordering of its economic and social life, he will not rest until this deplorable decadence of the mind and soul and body of Britain has been cut away in the surge and spirit of a race reborn.