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Britain's Green Fascists: Understanding the Relationship between Fascism, Farming, and Ecological Concerns in Britain, 1919-1951

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BRITAIN’S GREEN FASCISTS:
Understanding the Relationship between Fascism, Farming, and Ecological Concerns in Britain, 1919-1951

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts in History
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, who have always loved and supported me through all the highs and lows of my journey. Without them, this work would have been impossible.
I want to acknowledge many people for helping to make this thesis a reality. First, I must thank Dr. Closmann for all of his help and guidance during this process. I only stumbled across the idea for this thesis because of his Environmental History class. We once had a brief conversation during which I casually mentioned my interest in fascist history. Dr. Closmann then mentioned British Fascism as a topic to “consider” looking into. This thesis is the result of my consideration.

I also want to thank Dr. Kelly and Dr. Mieczkowski for reading my thesis, providing essential feedback, and serving on my thesis committee. I am grateful to both of you and look up to you as examples of what historians and professors should be.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between fascism, fascist ideas, and environmental consciousness in Britain during the pre- and post-World War II decades. In examining this topic, two main questions arise. First, why did fascist intellectuals support environmentally conscious ideas, and how did they relate these positions to their political ideologies? Second, why were many environmentally conscious thinkers during this period attracted to fascism? This thesis will also address several related issues regarding fascism and environmental consciousness. These issues include what role environmental concerns played in the British Union of Fascist’s platforms and in fascism’s public appeal, and how that role changed as the party’s needs and goals changed. This project also addresses how former members of the BUF drew attention to environmental issues after World War II, and how such ideas related to broader environmental discussions taking place in Britain at the time.
INTRODUCTION

The decline of agriculture has affected, not only agriculturalists, but the whole community…. An urban population, living as it does in unnatural surroundings, needs above all else an abundance of fresh, wholesome food to enable it to resist disease and attain full physical development. That it is denied by neglect of agriculture. The divorce from the soil is complete.¹

At first glance, these words could come from a modern environmentalist arguing for the importance of organic farming. Yet the above statement is an excerpt from Jorian Jenks’ The Land and the People (1938). Jenks was a British farmer and an early advocate for organic farming. He was also a Fascist. While fascism and ecological ideas may seem alien to one another at first, they were closely connected in Britain during the 1930s. Jenks was agricultural advisor to the British Union of Fascists (BUF)—Britain’s largest fascist movement—and the party’s de facto second-in-command. The Land and the People represented the party’s official agricultural policy. These were more than throwaway ideas; “returning to the soil” was key in the fascist platform for change in Britain.²

During the 1930’s and 1940’s, a groundswell of interest in land issues, the countryside, and the imbalance between rural and urban development emerged in Great Britain. This interest arose among political parties and social activist groups on the right and the left; in cities; and particularly in agrarian communities. Politically, these efforts

² Ibid, 8.
culminated with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and the creation of ten national parks in the 1950s. The social influences of this early British “Green Movement” were far-reaching, inspiring future generations to take greater interest in local, national, and global environmental concerns. Yet relatively few know that the British fascists played a key role in raising environmental concerns during this era.

Fascism first emerged in Britain during the early 1920’s, but it was not until Sir Oswald Mosley established the British Union of Fascists in 1932 that fascism received mainstream political attention. Among the numerous issues that Mosley and his supporters tackled during the BUF’s existence (1932-1940) were agrarian reforms, land management plans, and preservation proposals, some of which resembled laws in Nazi Germany and the United States. Leading Fascists and Far-Right supporters, most notably Jorian Jenks, Rolf Gardiner and Henry Williamson, continued to support conservation policies and agrarian reforms during and after World War II, to the point that discussing environmental concerns became a primary means through which many former members of the BUF engaged in politics after 1945. Although these discussions, especially before World War II, were often racially charged, their core ideas about reconciling nature with modernity nevertheless resonated with people on both ends of the political spectrum before, during, and after the war.

This study sheds new light on the relationship between fascism, fascist ideas, and environmental consciousness in Britain during the pre- and post-World War II decades. In examining this topic, two main questions arise. First, why did fascist intellectuals support environmentally conscious ideas, and how did they relate these positions to their political ideologies? Second, why were many environmentally conscious thinkers during
this period attracted to fascism? This thesis will also address several related issues regarding fascism, environmental consciousness, and the BUF. These issues include what role environmental concerns played in the BUF’s platforms and in fascism’s public appeal, and how that role changed as the party’s needs and goals changed. This project also addresses how former members of the BUF drew attention to environmental issues after World War II, and how such ideas related to broader environmental discussions taking place in Britain at the time.

The presumption exists throughout scholarly discussions surrounding the BUF, fascism, and Nazism that these groups and all of their ideas were delusional, racist, and wholly irrational. While this project does not deny that many of their views were grounded in unrealistic thinking or racist ideology, it will not assume that these individuals and their supporters were simply lunatics with no valuable contributions to discussions about humanity’s relationship with nature. British fascists were responding to legitimate concerns about their country, the economy, and the land, often in irrational and racially charged manners; but their ideas also contained many rational answers to these concerns. Was it possible for their supporters—perhaps those who agreed with Jenks’ or Williamson’s environmentally conscious ideas but were not themselves explicitly racist—to turn backward-looking ideas into progressive ones? Did fascist leaders themselves ever make such shifts in thinking? These are also important questions, ones that might shed new light on the fascist mindset and their influence on environmental discussions from the 1930’s through 1950’s.

One of fascism’s longest lasting and most important contributions to British politics and society was increasing awareness of agrarian and ecological issues. The
leading fascists who promoted ecological thinking and placed agrarian reforms at the forefront of their political and social concerns were Jorian Jenks and Henry Williamson. Through understanding the influence and motivations of these men and their close associates, especially Far-Right ecologist Rolf Gardiner, it becomes possible to glean a greater understanding of how British fascism and environmental awareness related to one another. Both men were drawn to fascism for similar reasons, as they both were World War I veterans who held a deep concern for the adverse effects that industrial society brought upon the land; the BUF provided a platform for these concerns in ways that the Conservative and Labor parties did not.

World War I was devastating to Europe’s people and its environments. With over 2 million dead and an additional 2 million casualties, Great Britain was one of the more heavily affected nations, with only France, Germany, and Russia having more killed or wounded between 1914 and 1918. Although there was no fighting on British soil, war mobilization led to significant pollution of Britain’s air and waterways, as well as millions of trees harvested for burning, construction, or ship-building purposes. The physical devastation in France and Belgium were far worse, as millions of bombs and land mines pocked the Earth along the Western Front and chemical weapons poisoned the air and killed any living things that were exposed to the fumes, even causing damage to plants, wildlife, and people miles downwind from the battlefields. The trenches were muddy and unsanitary places, perfect breeding ground for diseases and conditions like the Spanish Flu, Trench Foot, and Typhus. Many European veterans in the immediate

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post-World War I years blamed their own governments and democracy itself for allowing the war to happen, allowing so many men to die, and for so much natural destruction to take place.\(^5\)

For Williamson, Jenks, and their like-minded contemporaries, fascism was an alternative to the society that brought about World War I’s atrocities, the Great Depression, and the decline of the natural world. Nature became a symbol for these fascist intellectuals, representing a connection to the nation’s spirit and mythical past. Jenks, Williamson, and their admirers viewed nature’s decline as emblematic of society’s political, economic and social decadences. Reconciling the conflicting relationship between nature and society was key for these fascists, one which many in their ranks felt would help ease Britain’s ills and bring about a better world. This thinking was not unique to the fascists, but they were among the first to give “spiritual ecologism” a political platform, reaching a wide audience and influencing how British thinkers wrote and spoke about the environment.\(^6\) For the BUF, nature also became a simple and effective means through which the party could relate its fascist ideologies to the real-world problems facing Britain at the time. In this sense, the environment became one of the BUF’s most effective propaganda tools, as those most sensitive to Britain’s environmental problems—unskilled workers living in polluted urban slums,


\(^6\) Not quite the same as the recent religious movement called “Spiritual Ecology;” Jorian Jenks coined the name “spiritual ecologism” to describe the ideal relationship between human society and the environment that brought balance between nature and Britain’s “soul.” This philosophy colors virtually all of his own writings and relates to the attitudes that Henry Williamson, Oswald Mosley, and even non-fascist nature-writers such as Richard Jefferies took in their writings about the relationship between nature and humanity. More on how Jenks defines spiritual ecologism can be found in his *The Country Year* (London: Black House, 1946); and in Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism After 1945* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007), 64.
conservationists, war veterans, and struggling rural farmers—connected with fascist environmentally-sensitive rhetoric and formed the majority of the party’s political supporters after the mid-1930s.

Yet nature and agrarian issues were more than just political tools for some fascist intellectuals. After the party’s dissolution in 1940, former BUF members continued to engage environmental concerns, contributing to the country’s overall discussions about land, nature, farming, and conservation. Nature was still seen as a symbol for the country’s soul, but with the possibility of a British fascist state nonexistent after World War II, former BUF members chose to focus more of their time and energy on bringing about positive environmental changes, taking leadership roles in the Soil Association, the Rural Reconstruction Association, and other nature societies like the Kinship in Husbandry. Overall, this shows that several fascists were committed environmental thinkers, and suggests that their ideas were influential in growing Britain’s ecological movement in the 1930’s and after.

Historiographical Background

Very few historians have analyzed British fascist ecological views in great detail. However, numerous historians have written about fascism, fascist environmental thought more generally, and British fascism since the 1930s. For most of the twentieth century, fascism has generally been considered a “rejection of Enlightenment ideas and modernity, while emphasizing the importance of the state over the condition of the
individual.” However, recent literature has complicated and deepened this understanding, especially regarding the role that the environment has played in fascist ideology. While early Marxist narratives portrayed fascism as a hyper-capitalist reaction against the Left, recent historians like Robert O. Paxton and Ruth Ben-Ghiat have shed light on the intricacies and contradictions between fascist ideologies and fascist realities. They and other historians illustrate how fascism did not fit into a strictly “Right” or “Left” designation, while also calling into question the meaning and usefulness of the term “fascism” itself in describing political or social movements.

Marxist thinkers first contextualized fascism in the 1920s, arguing that the movement was antithetical to both Marxism and liberalism. León Trotsky considered Fascism to be “the political mechanism” through which imperialist capitalists sought to “conquer new territories and so on. The totalitarian state, subordinating all aspects of economic, political and cultural life to finance capital, is the instrument to create a supra-nationalist state, an imperialist empire, the rule of the continents, the domain of the world.” Although he was not the only one saying this, Trotsky produced one of the clearest and simplest explanations of fascism, and historians, from the 1930s through at least the 1960s, deviated little from his analysis.

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8 Ruth Ben-Ghiat illustrates the contradiction between fascist obsessions with ideas of the past and obsessions with health, modern science, and bettering society in *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
Yet not all historians agreed with Marxist views regarding Fascism. Timothy Mason—a British Marxist himself—challenged traditional theories in his 1966 essay “Labour in the Third Reich,” arguing “that both the domestic and foreign policy of the National Socialist government became, from 1936 onward, increasingly independent of the influence of the economic ruling classes, and even in some essential aspects ran contrary to their collective interests,” and that “it became possible for the National Socialist state to assume a fully independent role, for the ‘primacy of politics’ to assert itself.” Mason later expanded on this idea in his 1968 “Primacy of Politics: Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany.” Both Eichholtz and Gossweiler were adamant in their disagreement with Mason’s thesis, arguing that he “threatened the very foundations of Marxist social philosophy.”

In the same year, Ernst Nolte published his landmark work, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (1966). Nolte called fascism “the great anti-movement; it was anti-liberal, anti-socialist, anti-communist, anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois.” Nolte considered *Action Francaise* to be “the thesis, Italian fascism the antithesis, and German National Socialism a hybrid” of the two movements. Nolte’s interpretation dominated Western discussions of fascist origins and ideology for over a decade and still holds some influence today.

In his 1989 *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, Zeev Sternhell argued that nineteenth-century French philosopher Georges Sorel was the originator of fascist ideology, and that

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French fascist thought was “intellectually superior to the more successful Italian and German varieties.”

Sternhell also expanded on A. James Gregor’s 1974 *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics*, which argued that “ideologists of fascism are never merely content to further their policies as beliefs, but also support their positions with logical and rational thought.” Some historians, including Stanley Payne in his *A History of Fascism 1914-1945* (1995) agreed with Sternhell’s assertion that fascism originated in France. Others, such as David Roberts in *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (1979), challenged the idea of Sorel’s influence on fascist thought and especially on Italian syndicalists.

More recently, Robert O. Paxton, well-known for his groundbreaking work, *Vichy France* (1972), released *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). Paxton analyzed all of the major fascist regimes and gave attention to lesser known fascist parties in Eastern and Western Europe, including the British Union of Fascists. After looking at fascism in its totality, he concluded that fascism is

a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

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17 Ibid, 44.
19 Ibid, 5.
21 Ibid, 218.
Paxton further explains that all fascist parties rely on “the primacy of the group,” self-victimization, fear of liberal decadence, brotherhood, “an enhanced sense of self-identity and belonging” and the “authority of natural leaders” to attain and maintain power.\textsuperscript{22}

Paxton also claims that “the words of fascist intellectuals—even if we accept for the moment that they constitute fundamental philosophical texts—correspond only distantly with what fascists do after they have power,” and “early fascist programs are poor guides to later fascist policy.”\textsuperscript{23} Not all historians completely agree with this particular point. On one level, this argument is difficult to counter, as Paxton bases his assessment of the complex relationship between rhetoric and policy on the actions of fascist dictatorships. However, a counter-argument could be made that many fascist policies did reflect early fascist rhetoric, especially if one takes into account the extreme example of Hitler’s anti-Semitic views expressed in \textit{Mein Kampf}, and compare those to Nazi policies toward German Jews in the 1930s and later.

Some scholars have used this disconnect between fascist rhetoric and policy to discount the findings of some environmental historians, especially of those studying Nazi Germany’s environmental policies. For instance, David Blackbourn has argued that despite the Nazi Party’s obsession with going “back to the land” and rhetoric calling for the blending of nature with modernity, the Nazi regimes’ war mobilization efforts and its destructive acts during World War II revealed that connecting with nature did not matter

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid}, 6.
to the Nazis.\textsuperscript{24} Other historians have attempted to completely discredit any arguments suggesting the connection between 1930s ecological thought and Nazism, claiming that Nazis emphasized “blood, not soil,” and that race was the driving force in all of their policies. Historian Piers H. G. Stephens argued in 2001 that there was “no clear historical or necessary conceptual link between between ecologism and Nazism.”\textsuperscript{25} Yet the inconsistencies that historians have found between words and actions also makes studying fascist mentalities, culture, and politics more intriguing and often more revealing about the nature of fascism.

A moderate amount of scholarship exists on Oswald Mosley, the BUF, and British fascism. The earliest histories of British fascism appeared in the 1960s with Colin Cross’ \textit{The Fascists in Britain} (1961), and Robert Benewick’s \textit{Political Violence & Public Order} (1969). Cross’ work is considered analytically weak and dated, while Benewick’s is useful for framing the BUF as a politically violent group. However, most works before the late 1980s provided interpretations that were either too simple, or—as is the case with Mosley’s \textit{My Life} (1968)—too biased. Richard Thurlow provided a useful update in his \textit{Fascism in Britain: A History 1918-1945} (1998). Thurlow traced fascism’s origins in Britain and revealed how the BUF was not a sudden or standalone fascist entity, but the result of several precursor groups and disenchanted conservatives uniting under Mosley’s leadership.\textsuperscript{26} In the same year, Philip M. Coupland wrote “The Blackshirted Utopians” (1998), in which he claimed that the BUF’s key leaders were obsessed with turning

\textsuperscript{26} Thurlow, \textit{Fascism in Britain}. 
Britain into a fascist Utopia, tracing their intellectual influences back to eugenics and social Darwinism, British conservation, Utopian literature, Italian corporatism and Nazi racial theory.\textsuperscript{27}

The most prolific historian studying British fascism is Thomas Linehan, known for his examinations of the intellectual and cultural sides of fascism in his \textit{British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology, and Culture} (2000) and \textit{The Culture of Fascism: visions of the Far Right in Britain} (2003). Linehan’s works have examined the ideologies and culture of Britain’s far right, examining where fascism overlapped with other conservative movements as well as with more progressive ideas like agrarian reform. Most revealing is Linehan’s examination of the far right’s psychology; he argued that, despite all of the rhetoric as to what inspired their ideology and political aims, British fascists and their followers were motivated by fear above all else.

While studies on the BUF and the far right from before the twenty-first century tended to focus on fascism’s political trajectory, telling a story of failure and obscurity, Linehan’s focus on the far right’s cultural influences inspired renewed interest in British fascist studies over the last fifteen years. Monographs and articles detailing British fascism’s connection to Women’s Rights Movements, labor movements, and racial attitudes in cities and the countryside alike, have been published within the past decade, all pointing to fascism having a broader, deeper, and longer-lasting influence on British society than what historians previously believed.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{28} One such work is Julie V. Gottlieb’s \textit{Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain’s Fascist Movement, 1923-1945} (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004). Gottlieb details how former suffragettes joined British Fascist groups
Martin Pugh takes Linehan’s cultural examinations a step further in *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!: Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (2005). Pugh argues that while the fascists failed to find political success, their ideas permeated all levels of British society, showing how fascist thinking was widespread in the 1930s. Graham Macklin wrote a comprehensive history of the British fascist movements’ post-World War II existence in *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism After 1945* (2007). Macklin mentions Jenks’ and Williamson’s environmentally conscious writings, but ultimately considers these as part of “Mosleyism,” the continued fascist post-war movement devoted to Oswald Mosley.  

Macklin has also written multiple additional works on the BUF and British fascism in national culture, including an article assessing the connection between BUF and music titled, “Onward Blackshirts!: Music and the British Union of Fascists” (2013).

While all of these works about fascist ideology and British fascism prove useful in understanding the origins, history, and mindset of these groups, virtually none from before the 1980s focused on fascist environmental views in any meaningful way. In the case of British fascist historiography, only a small littering of articles have been written on environmental thought, all within the past fifteen years. Historians simply undervalued environmental rhetoric before this time, choosing to focus on political events, economic developments or social structures. It was only after the emergence of the modern environmental movement in Western nations during the 1960s and 1970s that historians began to examine fascist ideas about nature with more fervor. Rachel Carson’s *Silent and played major roles in the BUF, even going so far as to hold official rank within the party structure and stand for office in local elections.  

Spring (1962) brought significant public attention to environmental issues in the United States and abroad, giving a clear voice to activists who had expressed concerns over DDT, pesticide usage, and humanity’s negative influences on the environment.

By the late 1960s, commentators used the term “environmentalism” to describe the grassroots social movements that championed ecological, conservationist, and agricultural concerns. In 1970, the U. S. government created the Environmental Protection Agency, and during the 1970s green political parties appeared in Australia, New Zealand, and throughout Europe. In June 1972, the United Nations held the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, and has continued to hold conferences on environmental concerns since then. While ecological groups like the Sierra Club had existed since the late nineteenth century, and the United States and European nations had been passing environmental legislation cutting back on factory pollution in cities and protecting natural areas in the form of national parks and conservation areas since the early twentieth century, the 1970s marked the first time that there was a global environmental movement calling for greater protections and reforms. That is one reason why most historians today refer to environmental actions from before the mid-1960s as “ecology” or “conservation,” the other reason being that “environmentalism” was not a common term until after the early 1960s.

Once environmentalism took hold in society, historians began looking more closely at the role that the environment played in past societies and the attitudes that past peoples adopted towards their environment. Building off of earlier works that predated

environmentalism, yet placed great emphasis on the roles of geography, natural resources and physical space—such as Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949)—historians in the 1970s and 1980s wrote about the environment in new ways, creating the subfield of environmental history. This new approach often merged geography, biological science, intellectual and economic history, offering unique ways of understanding age-old topics like imperialism, war, political maneuvering, and migration. John McNeill’s work *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the 20th Century World* (2000) remains one of the most influential overviews of the subject. Joachim Radkau in *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (2008) provided a different perspective on environmental history, focusing on moments in the past where societies attempted to control nature for social or political reasons. Carolyn Merchant’s *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (2007) is one of the better overviews of American environmental history, while Alfred J. Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (1986), Donald J. Hughes’ *The Mediterranean: An Environmental History* (2005), and John Sheail’s *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* (2002) are among the best works focusing on Europe. Environmental history is one of the more dynamic and growing subfields of history, as it is becoming increasingly clear that the environment has always shaped human society and vice-versa.32

Fascism has also received significant attention from environmental historians since the 1980s. Fascists have always been highly popular and controversial subjects in history, and the fascists themselves had much to say about their environments; so it is no surprise that once environmental history developed as a subfield, historians examined the environmental views of fascists and the far-right. One of the earliest environmental histories on fascism is Anna Bramwell’s *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s Green Party* (1985). A highly controversial book, Bramwell examines Richard Walther Darré’s influence on Nazi environmental ideology, arguing that Walther Darré pushed Nazi Germany to promote the conservation of forests and nature, eating healthy, animal rights, organic farming, and self-sufficiency.³³ Bramwell claims that Nazi ideology tied German racial and ethnic identity to the land; to be German meant protecting and living in concert with the German landscape. Bramwell appears fascinated by the apparent conservative strain in Nazism that drove Germany to pursue what she calls “progressive” pro-environmental policies.

Bramwell further explored the connections between Nazism, fascism and conservation in *Ecology in the 20th Century: a History* (1989), and *The Fading of the Greens: the Decline of Environmental Politics in the West* (1994). She argued in her trilogy that for most of the twentieth century, conservation and environmental preservation were not consistent with liberal and Left-leaning ideologies and policies, but were consistent with political aims of the right. According to Bramwell, conservation, by its very definition, is a conservative act, requiring the government to restrain industrial and capitalist forces from using the land and natural resources for human purposes. She

argued that the political Left in Europe and America, at least from the late 1800s through the 1960s, placed human needs like public health, better worker’s rights, urban housing, and civil liberties first. The Left rarely wanted to constrain government, but rather hoped to use government to its fullest to better the human condition, even when that meant cutting down forests to build houses or increase industrial production and pollution to stimulate economic growth.34

Bramwell contrasted the Left with conservatives, who in many cases felt anxious or resentful over the social and economic changes brought upon by industrialization, such as population shifts from rural to urban areas, the diminishing of agriculture in economic importance and profitability, and the advancement of technology and science away from natural and traditional folk beliefs. In America, Populism encapsulated these anxieties, while in Europe Far-Right populist and Fascist groups capitalized on rural tensions. Thus, in her view, it was not at all surprising that Fascists and other right-leaning groups across Western Europe and North America embraced conservation and environmentally conscious policies before the 1960s, because ecology and agrarianism were natural fits with far-right political and social aims. Though her trilogy is now dated, her assertion remains influential, especially for those studying fascist ecological thinking.35

Many historians criticize Bramwell for ignoring Nazi environmental degradation, arguing that the Nazis were not a “green” party, but abused the environment for ideological and military purposes. David Blackbourn in The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany (2006) illustrates how German national

35 Bramwell, Blood and Soil, 1, 5, 20.
identity had been tied to romantic notions of the German landscape since at least the
nineteenth century and how Nazi German policies twisted these romantic notions to serve
their racial and ideological ends.\footnote{David Blackbourn, “Race and Reclamation,” in The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape and the
Making of Modern Germany (New York: Norton, 2006), 251-309.} Karl Ditt—known for many works, including “Nature
Conservation in England and Germany 1900-70: Forerunner of Environmental
Protection?”—supports this interpretation, comparing conservation policies in Germany,
Britain and the United States during the 1930s and arguing that in each country,
conservationists considered nature a source of national identity, also a key element in
fascist ideology.\footnote{Caroline Ford, “Nature’s Fortunes: New Directions in the Writing of European Environmental History,”
in The Journal of Modern History 79:1 (March 2007): 121.} Thomas Lekan in Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape
Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945 (2004) also provides a larger context to
Bramwell’s argument, positing that while there were Nazi officials like Darré who were
environmentally progressive and Nazi ideology appeared to support conservation on the
surface, in practice Nazi environmental policies were complicated and often negatively
shaped the environment.\footnote{Ibid, 123.}

Historians have complicated the narrative surrounding Nazi green policies,
illustrating the nuance and difficulty in proclaiming fascist or Nazi policies as truly
“green.” Marc Cioc, Thomas Zeller, and Charles Closmann are among several other
historians to assess fascist environmental policies and influences. These historians
explore the importance, depth, and purpose of Nazi Germany’s environmental
consciousness, but almost all agree that the Nazis’ environmental policies grew out of the
perceived necessity to balance the relationship between nature and modernity. Historians
of fascist environmental awareness also tend to identify the longstanding connection in pre- and post-First World War German society between ethnic identity and the land as a key influence on Nazi policies. Part of the contradiction in Nazi Germany’s environmental rhetoric is reconciling destructive realities—like war preparation and massive public projects such as the Autobahn—with land conservation legislation and propaganda that consistently promoted farming and a return to nature as keys to German national and racial identity.

Though few historians would be willing to call the Nazis a true “green” party today, many now recognize that the Nazis used the environment for complex political, ideological and economic purposes. While the Nazis themselves claimed to seek harmony between technology and nature, in reality the party’s actions were far less balanced. As a result of their contradictions, consensus on many questions regarding Nazi environmental awareness remains difficult.39

While no major work has yet been written on BUF environmental policies, a number of British historians have addressed the topic. J. W. Blench was the first to suggest that Henry Williamson and other British conservationists associated fascism with pro-environmental sentiments in “Henry Williamson and the Romantic Appeal of Fascism” (1988), but very little has been produced since expanding on this theory.40 One of the only studies to examine the link between British fascism and environmental concerns in an in-depth manner is Richard Moore-Colyer’s “Towards ‘Mother Earth’:

Jorian Jenks, Organicism, the Right, and the British Union of Fascists” (2004). This piece explores the influences on Jorian Jenks from other fascist leaders operating outside of the BUF, as well as his later influence on “green” social movements, like the Soil Association and organicism—the effort to raise food quality through promoting organic farming techniques.41

Moore-Colyer was a leading British environmental historian and a pioneer in studying the connections between far-right politics, agrarian reform, and nature conservation. As a result, his findings in this article and others he has written help inform some of the ideas put forth in this thesis. Aside from his valuable research into Jenks’ personal life and career, Moore-Colyer also posits that organicism, a “return-to-the-soil” mentality, and rural-nostalgic sentiments were part of BUF and other far right political platforms throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s.42 However, he stops this line of thinking at his examination of the BUF’s agricultural policies and Jenks’ role in forming them, leaving much room for further inquiry into the connections between British fascism and environmental consciousness.

Meanwhile, British historians have written extensively about early-twentieth century conservation and the political, cultural, and economic developments that interacted with environmental concerns, especially concerning issues of urban and rural planning. John Sheail’s An Environmental History of 20th Century Britain (2002) is the most comprehensive work, addressing issues ranging from town-planning to land-management and debates over national park size and scope. An important recent work

42 Ibid, 357-58.
that examines environmental concerns during this period is Brian Short’s *Battle of the Fields: Rural Community and Authority in Britain during the Second World War* (2014). While Short briefly establishes the connection between fascist thinkers and agrarian politics during the interwar years, his more important contribution to the overall historiography is his analysis of important rural issues that dominated the era, contextualizing the discussions that far-right intellectuals were having about the environment in the period.

Chapter 1 will include examinations of the adverse effects of World War I on British society and the environment, the origins of ecological and agrarian reform efforts in Britain during the 1920s, the connection between ecology, agrarianism, and Far-Right politics before and during the 1920s, and the rise of British Fascism during the 1920s. Chapter 1 will also include reasons why agrarian workers and ecologists joined British Fascist movements in the late 1920s and early 1930s and will explore the common connections between agrarianism, ecologism, and British Fascism.

Chapter 2 will examine the British Union of Fascists and its ecological and agrarian policies from 1932 until the Party’s dissolution in 1940. The chapter will explore how and why the BUF attempted to address agrarian concerns and will explore how the Party’s ecological policies changed over time to reflect the Party’s evolving overall goals.

Chapter 3 will explore how the British government changed its agricultural policies during World War II, how British Fascism evolved after 1945, and how British Fascists involved themselves in ecological and agricultural groups during and after World War II. This chapter will assess the influence that British Fascists had on ecological
thought in Britain during this time and will discuss the legacy of Far-Right ecological thought in the country’s environmental history.

In an age in which far-right politics appears resurgent in Western nations—and especially so in Great Britain—resembling, though certainly not matching, some of the vitriolic and nationalistic sentiments of the past, it is more important than ever to develop a deeper understanding of fascist and far-right ideologies. Incidentally, the last four decades have also seen a dramatic increase in environmental awareness across the world. By understanding how fascism and environmental consciousness have intersected in the past, society will be better equipped to make sense of how far-right politics and modern environmentalism may interact in years to come.
CHAPTER I: GREEN & BLACK ROOTS, 1919-1932

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

—Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, 1915

Great War poets beautifully encapsulated the pain that their fellow veterans carried with them during and after World War I (1914-1918). Both in the trenches and years after returning home, this generation of poets and writers often looked to the land and nature to express their emotions. Some of these war-veteran writers, including a young Henry Williamson, viewed nature as more than an effective literary device and took keen interest in farming, nature conservation practices, and land management issues during the 1920’s. These sentiments spread beyond Britain’s writers and poets. Many veteran farmers and poorer workers, as well as students and local activists, recognized nature as a symbol for national health and vitality. World War I’s environmental destruction inspired many Britons to take steps to reverse damages and preserve national

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44 Analysis of Great War poetry and memory can be found in: Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Stirling, 1979).
beauty. The 1920’s also saw growing efforts to reform rural land use and increase agrarian economic production.\textsuperscript{45}

In response to calls for responsible land use and veterans’ concerns over economic and agricultural security, Parliament attempted to use the \textit{Land Settlement Act} (1919), along with other laws, to reintegrate veterans into society and revitalize stagnant rural economies.\textsuperscript{46} Yet those who supported Parliament’s efforts in the early 1920’s felt that the system had failed them by the decade’s end. Having already contended with depressed markets for years, farmers were hit particularly hard once the Great Depression devastated global markets in 1929-30.\textsuperscript{47} Dissatisfied with Parliament’s slow efforts at addressing agrarian concerns, disillusioned with a status quo that allowed millions to die in the Great War and did nothing to prevent the Great Depression, thousands of farmers and conservationists turned to Britain’s fledgling Fascist parties after 1929.

At the same time, only a fraction of farmers, Great War veterans, and conservationists embraced British Fascism in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For instance, of the BUF’s estimated 100,000 members in 1934, only half were rural.\textsuperscript{48} While pockets like Suffolk strongly supported the BUF, nationally-speaking these were exceptions rather than the rule.\textsuperscript{49}

This chapter presents reasons why several prominent conservationists, farmers, and nature-writers supported British Fascism and far-right ideology. Men like Jorian Jenks, Henry Williamson, Rolf Gardiner, and Arnold Leese, despite hailing from

\textsuperscript{45} John Sheail, \textit{An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain} (London: Palgrave, 2002), 24.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 123.
different social backgrounds and holding different professions, shared similar experiences that led them to embrace environmental interests in the 1920’s, then Fascism in the 1930’s. Analyzing these commonalities reveals important elements that shaped Britain’s “Green” Blackshirts. While far from being a universally applicable profile, those in the 1920’s who had experienced war’s destructive power firsthand, held some vested interest in nature and the land, and felt frustrated over agrarian economic struggles, were more likely to support Fascism than those who lacked such experiences.

The scars of war and industry: Britain’s rural economy in the 1920s

At the end of World War I in 1918, 50 million European veterans returned home. Over 21 million of these men returned wounded, casualties in what was then the largest and bloodiest war in Europe’s history. In Great Britain alone, the conflict’s human costs felt immense. From 1914 to 1918, Britain lost approximately 2 million lives to combat or disease, with at least 1,675,000 total wounded, many missing limbs or worse. Another 2,101,077 wounded between 1914 and 1918, including over one million non-white soldiers, hailing from throughout the British Empire and suffering in the same fashion as their so-called “native Anglo-Saxon” counterparts, contributed significantly to the Empire’s total pain. Soldiers and citizens in France, Germany, and Russia suffered

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51 Ibid., 675.
53 Ibid., 12.
as much or more than the British did.\textsuperscript{54} Many of those lucky enough to survive the trenches physically intact could not mask the emotional and psychological scars that the war left them with. Trench life was grueling, disease-ridden, and sobering, while the daily possibility of death from mustard gas, machine-gun fire, grenades, bombs, or worse weighed heavily on everyone involved. The war’s unprecedented death and environmental destruction also left many survivors suffering from PTSD. It was a miracle to escape physically unscathed; it was impossible to escape psychologically whole. Europe’s “Lost generation” had experienced what many survivors considered Hell on Earth.\textsuperscript{55}

After the war, Europeans began the arduous process of rebuilding. Many politicians, including U. K. Prime Minister David Lloyd George, hoped that the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and the League of Nations would maintain world peace for the foreseeable future. Industry was robust and the British Empire was atop the global power structure. Domestically, new reforms included women’s suffrage, healthcare expansion, and worker’s compensation reform.\textsuperscript{56} For the political and upper classes, the early 1920s was a period of hope and renewal.

The optimism that politicians and the upper classes felt after winning World War I contrasted with the relative pessimism that permeated the English countryside.

\textsuperscript{54} Exact statistics for those countries can be found in John Ellis, \textit{The World War I Databook} (London: Aurum Press, 2001).


\textsuperscript{56} Lloyd George’s government enacted many of these social reform policies immediately following the Great War. More on his government’s optimism for social welfare can be found in Martin Pugh, \textit{David Lloyd George} (Oxford University Press, 2009).
Although the Great Depression would not impact the upper classes until 1929, a great depression had been eroding the country’s rural economy since at least 1900, with crop prices falling consistently since the 1850s. This rural market collapse occurred all across Europe and in America during the late nineteenth century, especially in recently-industrialized countries that had once relied on agriculture for economic sustainability. Advances in agrarian science and technology had made farming more efficient, thus making food more abundant and cheaper to produce and sell. This drove smaller farms into financial ruin as grain prices plummeted.

Rural economic depression drove large population shifts in England, the United States, France, and other nations, from rural areas into urban centers. Populations doubled all across Europe and North America due to increased food production, reducing farm profitability and driving more people to seek work in cities and factory towns; “where every second English person born was an urban dweller in 1851, four out of five persons lived in towns and cities in 1911.” The dramatic population shift from rural to urban meant more labor, productivity, and capital went toward factories and developing urban centers, perpetuating and accelerating industrialization. Those farmers who stayed on their land struggled to remain viable in the midst of a decades-long systemic deconstruction of pre-industrial life. The modern world was leaving them behind.

Adding to rural despair was the fact that a disproportionate number of World War I veterans and casualties came from rural areas or were children of rural farmers. Those who fought on the front lines and in the trenches were typically from lower class families

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57 Sheail, An Environmental History, 11.
58 Ibid., 11-12.
59 Ibid., 14.
and rural communities. British officers and those in positions less likely to face death were comprised primarily of men from upper class or noble lineage. Urban health was a key factor that determined military recruiting during the early 1900’s, and especially in 1914. The poor health and physique of urban dwellers in comparison to rural folk, a pattern seen across England at the time, led recruiters to conclude based on Social Darwinian theory that “the main determinant of human welfare might be the urban environment itself… not only might moral principles afford little protection against the deleterious effects of urban civilization, but the genetic effect might become so strong as to lead to a progressive degeneration of human stock.” Thus, army recruiters favored rural men before and during World War I. Class division meant that while all experienced the horrors of war, those of poor rural standing fought, suffered and died in higher numbers than other social groups. High rural casualties further depressed the number of farmers able to work the land in the 1920’s.

Government responses to rural grievances did little to convince the disillusioned that Parliament cared. In order to pay for the social reforms of the early interwar years, the government abolished the Agricultural Wages Board in 1921, depressing farmer earnings in the process. Although the Rural Reconstruction Association (RRA), founded in 1926, worked with the government to rebuild and revitalize the British countryside by buying and reselling derelict farms and promoting “intensive farming”

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60 Statistics of the Military Effort, 342.
61 Parliamentary Papers (August 1904), 779.
62 Statistics of the Military Effort, 345.
practices, Parliament took relatively little action to reverse rural economic depression.\textsuperscript{64} Instead, for most of the early twentieth century, the British government’s primary focuses were improving urban life and overall national health. Victorian-Era slums in London, Manchester, and Dublin, as well as most other major cities in the UK, were heavily polluted, crime-ridden, and diseased places to live. Although quality of life had improved somewhat during the early 1900’s, the English business-class “consciously cultivated” such descriptions of urban slums to create political support for urban revitalization.\textsuperscript{65} The Liberal government established the Ministry of Health in 1919 and passed new health insurance acts to cover veterans and poor urban workers.\textsuperscript{66}

Parliament aimed to achieve better urban health through extensive town-planning, housing, and urban redevelopment projects. Their first step was the \textit{Housing Town and Planning Act 1919}.\textsuperscript{67} The Act represented the government’s attempt to exert control over shaping the English environment, an idea that had its roots in early 1900’s town planning projects and in responses to the Great War experience. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, two writers who had input in shaping the act, wrote that Britain “had become a very different entity” since the Victorian Era and that the most important factor in the human environment was humanity’s ability to shape, control, and adapt to the world around them.\textsuperscript{68} The Act reflected this mentality, legalizing government control over new urban and suburban development. Part of the Act stated that no building could be constructed

\textsuperscript{65} Sheail, \textit{An Environmental History}, 13.
\textsuperscript{67} Paul Oliver, et. al., \textit{The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies} (London: Bodleian, 1918), 31.
\textsuperscript{68} Sheail, \textit{An Environmental History}, 23.
without oversight or supervision, while another clause determined how and where certain plots were to be zoned and developed.\textsuperscript{69}

The idea of controlling nature and reshaping the land in humanity’s image was an old one, extending as far back as the beginnings of civilization. Yet the idea that shaping the human environment could be rationalized, codified and perfected through science, government oversight, and law on a national scale was a product of the Industrial Revolution and World War I. The urban redevelopment projects of the interwar years represented decades of scientific advancement and industrial rationalization poured into molding a better urban environment. Even though the government cut funding after economic downturns in 1920 and 1923, because the plan resulted in over 213,000 new homes built with government subsidies and new roads for cities and towns across England, contemporaries generally regarded the housing and town planning laws of the early 1920’s as mixed successes.\textsuperscript{70}

Few said the same for government efforts to revitalize rural living spaces in the 1920’s. In 1919, Parliament passed the \textit{Land Settlement (Facilities) Act}, which encouraged people to take up farming and also aimed to “provide allotments in urban areas.”\textsuperscript{71} The Act gave counties the right to provide “smallholdings” to World War I veterans and removed the requirement that new small landowners have farming


\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Facts and Figures for Socialists, 1951} (London: Labour Party Research Department), 1950.
Parliament hoped that by giving veterans farmland, local governments could reduce unemployment and introduce new labor to the country’s agricultural sector. The government passed the *Agriculture Act 1920* as a means to ensure farmers a minimum wage while promising to guarantee produce prices through 1921. Yet these Acts failed to resolve farmers’ problems. Few veterans wanted to farm, and those that did took over plots that had sat vacant for years, if not decades, making the land laborious and costly to tame. Worse still, these new, largely inexperienced farmers faced competition on the national and global market from large farms and overseas production.

The minimum wage guaranteed in the *Agriculture Act*, while being a government-assured income, was considered “too low” for agricultural workers to farm at a profitable level, while guaranteed produce prices were still too high to compete with incredibly cheap foreign imports from Russia, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Other laws passed in the 1920’s attempted to mitigate these underlying issues, but by 1928, between 45 and 55 percent of English farmland sat abandoned.

The core issue was that there was simply no market for British produce. Even if all farms were operational, farmers would not have been able to sell their goods at a profitable rate. No matter what promises Parliament made, there were no new farming jobs to be had for veterans, given Britain’s economic climate at the time. Labor and production that the country’s agricultural sector had lost to city factories and to foreign countries since 1850 were gone. Even when the government introduced new capital and

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74 *Ibid.*, 44.  
labor into the countryside, production and profit did not return because farmers were still facing the exact same global market pressures that drove British farming into depression to begin with. The governments’ desire to put farmers on land made no economic sense, but was in essence a culturally motivated project. MPs from rural areas felt that Britain needed farmers and saw farming as an essential aspect of British life and national identity.

The post-World War I economic downturn between 1920 and 1923 made matters for British farmers and urban workers worse. The government contended with worker’s strikes in 1921 and 1922 in both London and Manchester, creating instability for the Liberal Party and leading to the rise of both the Conservative (Tory) and Labour Parties. Labour aimed to improve urban life and strengthen union representation, while the Tories fought for the business class and for industrial farming interests. Rural workers hoped that the Conservatives would represent them well in government, and some Conservative MP’s truly wanted to, but ultimately the Tories achieved little to reverse decades of rural economic decline. A nationwide general strike in 1926 signaled to many in London that Britain’s overall economy was frail, but as industrial production and international trade increased, few in power sought to change course.

Although Britain’s middle and upper classes emerged from World War I and the early 1920’s in relatively stable condition, the rural and urban working classes faced many challenges. Despite the government’s successful attempts to bring about urban improvements, the rural economy and agrarian environment remained untouched and

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76 Sheail, An Environmental History, 29.
77 Parliamentary Papers 1936-37, 221.
78 Sheail, An Environmental History, 45, 48, 50.
largely ignored. Wartime suffering followed by economic struggle and a minimal response from government stirred resentment within the hearts and minds of many farmers and rural veterans. Fear of being left behind economically and ignored politically magnified resentful feelings among these groups. Farmers felt that they needed political representation and a party that not only valued their contributions to society, but also promised to improve their lives quickly. Some among them took to writing about their grievances, while others took political action. These men and women would find common ground in farming, nature, and in fascism.

Returning to the land: nature writers, agrarian workers, and activists of the 1920’s

While Britain recovered from World War I, many advocates began calling for greater national interest in land, nature, farming and conservation. Henry Williamson and Rolf Gardiner were two activist writers who promoted nature and farming, while Jorian Jenks worked as an agricultural officer in Britain and New Zealand throughout the 1920’s and sought to reshape the relationship between land, economy, and government from within. Together, these figures and their allies would strengthen the ties between conservation and conservatism in British society, raising awareness of agrarian issues that Parliament had failed to sufficiently address. These men found solace in nature and considered it a means to escape the damages of war and the decadence of industrial society, a shared view that would draw them toward radical ideologies in the 1930’s.

World War I devastated Europe’s environments. The human cost was exceptionally high, but so too was the cost on Europe’s land and forests. Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia cut down tens of millions of acres of woodland to build ships, barracks, and other necessities of war. Environmental historian John McNeil
has suggested that “much less was done in war than in the name of war” when it came to environmental impact.\textsuperscript{79} Although no fighting took place in Britain, the mobilization efforts on the Home Front took its toll on the country’s environment, dramatically depleting the country’s forests and polluting the country’s air and waterways due to increased factory production. Across the English Channel the fighting brought devastation to the land. Millions of bombs and landmines destroyed entire countrysides in France and Belgium, while chemical weapons devastated all forms of organic life on and around the battlefield. British expert Brigadier General Hartley noted in 1918 that “gas is the only weapon that which can produce continuous effects both in time and space.”\textsuperscript{80} Europe’s natural landscapes were destroyed, and the scars left on the fields of the Western Front can still be seen today in the forms of grass-covered craters and landmines hidden beneath dandelions and weeds.

World War I dramatically shaped Henry Williamson’s worldview. Just one month after his 18th birthday, on January 22, 1914, Williamson volunteered as a rifleman in the fifth battalion of the “London Rifle Brigade.”\textsuperscript{81} He served throughout the Great War and witnessed the famous “Christmas Truce” of 1914 between the Allied forces and German regiments on France’s Western Front, an event that deeply influenced Williamson’s opinion of the German people for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{82} Williamson believed that the British and Germans had far more in common as peoples than they had differences. He had spoken to many German soldiers and realized that “their fears, hopes and worries

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{The London Gazette}: (Supplement) no. 29127. p. 3587. April 13, 1915.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 3587.
were the same as [his] own” and felt the agony of every dying German soldier as they “cried out for their mothers just as did the English Tommy.”

He also had a German grandmother, and thus was fighting “The Cousin’s War,” a popular British name for World War I, as Kaiser Wilhelm II and King George V were first cousins. By war’s end, Williamson became “disgusted at the pointlessness of war” and grew “angry at the greed and bigotry” he believed caused so much carnage. He called the Great War “the machine of civilisation running backwards into chaos.” Williamson believed that the war represented “a terrible misunderstanding or a failure to understand both sides could be right in a deadly quarrel from their points of view.” The war’s destruction remained etched in Williamson’s mind and inspired him to pursue a life committed to nature and pacifism. He recounted many of his war-time experiences in The Wet Flanders Plain (1929), The Patriot’s Progress (1930), and his fifteen-book series A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight (1951-1969).

Williamson’s wartime trials laid the foundations for both his turn to nature-writing in the 1920’s and his embrace of British Fascism in the 1930’s. Already having seen the Western Front and experienced the diseased existence of trench life firsthand, Williamson felt that humanity had lost its connection to nature and to itself during the war. The war changed his outlook on conflict, as he “saw [the enemy’s] point of view as practically the same as my own—or our own, and it was a tremendous shock. And ever

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84 Ibid., 17.
afterword I was trying to resolve that and to create… to show the idea of beauty and truth and courage and everything like that in animals and in men.”

Although initially he had no true outlet for his passions, in 1920 Williamson read Richard Jeffries’ *The Story of my Heart: an Autobiography* (1883); Williamson claimed that Jeffries “wrote about the English countryside with such beauty and truth that it inspired me and set me on the same path.”

The literary connection between Richard Jeffries and Henry Williamson encapsulates the transformation in outlook that many green-minded Britons underwent during the early twentieth century. Jeffries embodied a generation that passively admired nature while Williamson’s generation actively promoted nature as a necessary balancing force to be reconciled with modern life. Jeffries was England’s most prominent nature-writer in the late nineteenth century, considered by many literary critics to be a “founding father” of the genre. In *The Story of my Heart*, his most famous work, Jeffries idealized the English countryside and depicted England’s farms and fields as natural utopias. Jeffries’ style and content influenced many writers that came after him. Rachel Carson, for instance, had two copies of his book resting on her bedside table. The following passage illustrates how Jeffries connected humanity and nature in his writing: “Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. …Woods hid the scattered

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88 Ibid., 26.
89 Ibid., 27-28.
hamlets and farmhouses, so that I was quite alone… Next to myself I came and recalled myself, my bodily existence.”

Despite his significant literary impact, Jeffries’ works lacked the political arguments that Williamson and his contemporaries presented through nature-writing. During the 1920s, as his confidence and talent as a writer grew, Williamson shifted towards a form of activist writing, using his stories as allegories for humanity’s failure to reconnect with the land. Williamson called this disconnect between nature and modernity the “conflict between love and lovelessness, which causes man to be at war with himself and men to be at war with each other.” In nature, Williamson maintained, humanity could find love in its purest form to break the cycle of conflict and despair.

Prior to beginning his political career in the mid-1930’s, Williamson’s clearest instance of blending nature-writing with a social message was *Tarka the Otter: His Joyful Water-Life and Death in the Country of the Two Rivers* (1927). Through the story of a small otter named Tarka, Williamson crafted a narrative about British wildlife struggling to adapt to the changing world. Throughout, Williamson showed deep concern about nature and humanity’s impact on land and animals. In personifying Tarka, Williamson turned the otter into a symbol for humanity’s unnecessary self-destruction. By destroying that which is pure and beautiful, like nature or the self-aware otter, humanity only harms itself. By endowing Tarka with human emotional responses to man’s animalistic, destructive behaviors, Williamson engaged in a process that he called “freeing one’s

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92 Ibid., 3-4.
94 Ibid., 49-50.
Williamson believed that “we all have a certain amount of animal in us, and when man creates or tries to make beauty he is freed of that and becomes harmonious. …there is a purpose in life, I think, (an) evolutionary process to create harmony and beauty—and I think that’s God [sic].” Williamson gained significant fame for his nature-writing and activism during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s.

Williamson’s ideas echoed decades of angst over industrial and technological progress that British thinkers felt and discussed. As Thomas Linehan described in his study of British Fascist culture, far-right thinkers of the 1920’s and 1930’s “positioned [themselves] within a long-standing domestic tradition of anti-industrial thought that reached back to the pre-Victorian era.” Linehan pointed to Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) and the Neo-Gothic revival movement as originators of such thought. This movement translated anxiety over industrialization “into nostalgia for the Catholic Middle Ages, which [Pugin] imagined to be a harmonious, ordered age that prized spiritual and aesthetic values above all else,” as opposed to his own secular world characterized by “environmental ugliness and social dissonance.” Linehan also identified the Oxford Architectural Movement of the 1830’s and the works of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin as contributing to the “Merrie England” myth, the widely-held Victorian notion that industrialization was morally corrupt and contributed to a decline in British life and land, while the country’s golden age rested in its pre-industrial past. Jeffries and Williamson

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96 Ibid., 29-30.
98 Ibid., 259.
99 Ibid., 259-260.
both perpetuated this myth through their utopian depictions of the British landscape, while Williamson openly condemned modern society for degrading the countryside.  

One reason why so many felt anxious about natural degradation was the belief that nature’s decline reflected national and ethnic weakness. Few on either side of Britain’s political spectrum disputed the reality that industrialization and population concentration in urban centers lowered public health standards. Yet Far-Right thinkers, as early as the 1870’s, argued that this led to a weakening of the Anglo-Saxon race and put Britain’s future at risk.  

Supporters of this idea argued that World War I had dramatically accelerated the degradation of nature and therefore the weakening of Britishness. Parliament had done little to reverse the trend. Some, like nature-writer E. D. Randall, argued that the government had entered into a cabal with corporate interests to intentionally undermine the British people.  

James Drennan, another 1920’s writer and eventual Mosleyite, claimed that “the remorseless power of the machine” was “chawing into pulp the whole cultural life of the Europe” of history and tradition, and that modernity threatened to ruin the very fabric of British national identity.  

Intimately tied to the “Merrie England” myth was the notion that the landscape was spiritually connected to national identity. In 1925, thinkers on the right argued that by embracing modernity, industrial technology, and the positivist obsession with materialism and “cold science,” society and nature had deteriorated.  

Henry Williamson wrote in 1928 that the modern Englishman had “lost the clarity of mind and mental

100 Richard Jeffries, After London (London: Self-Published 1885); and Henry Williamson, The Lone Swallows and Other Essays of Boyhood and Youth (London: Putnam, 1933), 151, 159, 194.  
102 Action, June 4, 1936, 6.  
103 James Drennan, BUF Oswald Mosley and British Fascism (London: John Murray, 1934), 186.  
fearlessness which would guarantee the creation of a better world,” because the “town-
mind had lost touch with the truths of sky, grass, and sunshine.” A. K. Chesterton, a
town-planner during the 1920’s and conservative, wrote in 1931 that Britain needed to
completely overhaul urban slums so that they “capture the sun and air” and “give life to
the urban eye.” This infusion of nature into urban life became a central aspect of the
BUF’s proposed urban reforms after Chesterton joined the party in 1933.

Proponents of a land-race connection also leaned on eugenic theory and social-
Darwinian racial theory to support their claims. The belief in the link between nature and
race or nationality was also shared throughout Europe, and especially in Germany, where
the Voelkisch identity connoted a spiritual and physical bond between the German
landscape and German-ness. The manner in which men like Rolf Gardiner, Jorian Jenks,
E. D. Randall, and William Joyce utilized these pseudoscientific social theories was
superficial. Rather than genuinely research the effects of modernization on public health,
far-right thinkers took racially-charged theories at face-value and twisted them to fit their
pre-existing notions regarding race, nature, and society. Romantic nature-writers and
advocates like Williamson and Rolf Gardiner mistrusted science and industrialization, yet
placed their trust in pseudoscientific, spiritualistic racial theories to support their
views.

The mistrust of science within Britain’s Far Right stemmed from the country’s
Great War experience, as well as from pre-war arguments against science and positivism.

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107 Julie V. Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*
Although many scholars have called the Fascist obsession with pre-industrial life and the countryside anti-modern, British far-right thinkers from the period often argued that it was positivism—the philosophy dedicated to science, reason, and rational thought as absolute and objective methods for conducting human existence—that was rooted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ways of thinking. E. D. Randall and James Strachey Barnes, other British conservationists who embraced fascism in 1933, both claimed that positivists’ “grim fetish-worship of science” would invariably lead to a society in which there were “no mysteries or miracles left to man,” stifling human creativity and sterilizing modern culture. Henry Williamson and his contemporaries saw the Great War as the natural result of a society that was overly reliant on positivist thinking, that valued capitalist material wealth, industrial progress, and scientific thought over the lives and health of its people. Both Williamson and Rolf Gardiner rejected positivist and materialist philosophies in favor of “romantic spiritualism,” or the embrace of human “energy, light, ‘realism’ and the hatred of social decadence.” These ideals defined British Fascist ideology regarding the metaphysical and natural world.

Rolf Gardiner (1902-1971) was a particularly unique figure who combined a love of nature with fascistic leanings. He first garnered attention in 1923 as editor of Youth, the leading British journal for college students. That year, he wrote that he was “severely chastened” by the “approaching winter of Western Civilisation.” His only hope in the future was faith that a “new aristocracy” would be able to “divine new possibilities of life

108 Linehan, *British Fascism*, 263.
109 Ibid., 254.
for all.”112 His comments on the impending collapse and renewal of modern society were central to his vision of British life. His voice became the most prominent in shaping “England’s own version of a *Voelkisch* tendency which, whilst it did not achieve the prominence of its German counterpart, is increasingly recognized as a significant constituent of mid-twentieth century English cultural life.”113

Gardiner was a dancer, a nudist, and one of the earliest proponents of practicing organic farming on a nation-wide scale. Between 1922 and 1938 he led dance troupes on tours across Britain and Germany, through which he made many connections among German folk-artists and farmers. His contemporaries knew him as a leader in “Anglo-German cultural exchange.”114 During one of his tours in 1926, Gardiner became familiar with Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner and his 1924 experiments with biodynamic farming, the practice of creating sustainable agriculture and increasing soil fertility without the use of pesticides or artificial fertilizers.115 Gardiner brought his knowledge back to Britain in 1927, experimented with biodynamic farming himself, and shared his ideas on the subject with his friend Lord Lymington, who also began practicing biodynamic farming shortly afterward.116 Matthew Jeffries noted in his “Rolf Gardiner and German Naturism” that it was through these encounters in the 1920’s that Gardiner grew to love nature and the land, developing his own version of a *Voelkisch* national

113 Ibid., 2.
114 Ibid., 44-5.
identity in the process. Gardiner believed hiking and conservation were two key ways to renew national spirit and joined the Rural Reconstruction Association shortly after its founding in 1926 to help promote these ideas on a broader scale.

In 1927, Gardiner took over Gore Farm in Dorset, which his relative Henry Balfour Gardiner had originally purchased in 1924. Gardiner used the land to practice biodynamic farming and participate in a large scale forestation project designed to conserve conifers and beech trees. He also used his farmland as a center for a nature support group known as the Gore Kinship. His 1920’s experiences as a farmer and a conservationist, as well as his relationship to the Balfour family, would resonate with him for the rest of his life and shape the course of his political activism in the 1930’s towards promoting conservation and rural revitalization.

Other conservationists within Britain’s Far-Right took action in more direct ways to reverse trends of urbanization and agricultural degradation during the 1920’s. In particular, Jorian Jenks (1899-1963) used his position in the British Department of Agriculture to try and better farmers’ lives. He believed that nature was essential to national and individual health and that Parliament had failed to take the necessary steps to revitalize the rural economy, proving overly reliant on “Big-Agro” and choosing quantity over quality when it came to food production. He familiarized himself with Rudolf Steiner’s biodynamic farming techniques during his time at Oxford in 1928. He took

118 Ibid., 53.
120 Ibid.
121 Jorian Jenks, “Jenks to Beveridge,” April 26, 1926.
inspiration from German, British, and New Zealand farming practices when he developed his own beliefs and shared his ideas through his writings and through political activism in the 1930s.

Jenks was an agriculturalist for the majority of his life. H. J. Massingham called him a true “Yeoman” farmer and a workaholic “of that rural middle class that forms the first storey of the national building.” Jenks considered “country dancing as his only form of relaxation.” It was through dance that he first encountered Rolf Gardiner in 1929. This, along with their shared political and agricultural interests, led to the two maintaining a correspondence through the 1950’s. After graduating from Harper Adams Agricultural College with a National Diploma in Agriculture in 1920, Jenks managed a Berkshire farm for two years before the depressed rural market forced him to look to the colonies for work. He settled in New Zealand where he “worked on a series of projects concerned broadly with aspects of the restoration of derelict land” from 1922 to 1927.

In New Zealand, Jenks first became politically active. There, he contributed to multiple agricultural journals and educated himself on the economic and social intricacies of agrarian life. He wished to learn how “a farm might be run on business-like terms, but as time went on he increasingly understood how the fortunes of each farmer were also dependent on the national and global economies that overarched them.” Typically,

124 Ibid., 1.
126 Ibid., 357.
127 Coupland, Farming, Fascism and Ecology, 54.
only the highly-educated placed themselves within a global economic worldview and grasped that grain yields in other countries or colonies impacted domestic markets and prices. Yet Jenks was well-equipped to learn about local, national, and global agrarian economics, as he was educated and he experienced the global market firsthand while in New Zealand. He witnessed how a society in which “the rural economy and the national economy were closely linked together” could function.\textsuperscript{128} New Zealand served as a great example of how the rural economy and the “real economy”—what Jenks called the system that creates the goods and services necessary for living—could intersect; there, farming was “at the heart of…life.”\textsuperscript{129}

In 1928, Jenks returned to Britain and studied agriculture at Oxford. He saw this as an “ironic” move, leaving New Zealand for a country where “farming was a neglected sideshow.”\textsuperscript{130} Britain’s economy was devoted to “the financial interests of the City of London;” Jenks’ studies focused on answering the “how and why of these circumstances, of solving the puzzle of why farmers, in what were otherwise ideal conditions for agriculture, could often scarcely survive.”\textsuperscript{131} At Oxford, Jenks joined the Agricultural Economics Research Institute (AERI), a group self-described as “a National Research Institute set up for the purpose of studying the structure and economic organisation of farming in [Great Britain], the interrelation of politics and farming, and the effect of

\textsuperscript{128} Jorian Jenks, “Jenks to Gardiner,” August 21, 1952.
\textsuperscript{129} Coupland, \textit{Farming, Fascism and Ecology}, 55.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Ibid.}, 55.
international—foreign and colonial—agricultural systems and development on British farming policy.”

Jenks made many connections during his time at Oxford. In 1929, he worked under Charles S. Orwin, among the first professional agriculturalists in Britain and Director of AERI. Orwin was “deeply attached to the countryside,” but declined to romanticize the landscape. Instead, Orwin stressed “modernisation” of the rural economy in a plan that he laid out in *The Future of Farming* (1929). He argued that after the repeal of the Corn Laws of 1846, an action which made it legal to mass-produce grains and sell them cheaply, British agriculture declined steadily. Between 1846 and 1926, the prices of corn and other cash crops had fallen so dramatically that most sections of British agriculture were simply not profitable for farmers. Orwin accurately claimed that British farming was already depressed significantly and had been for most of the twentieth century. He also claimed that the system faced “total collapse” and only an “agricultural revolution” would save British farmers from oblivion.

Orwin proposed that Parliament transform land ownership practices in Great Britain. He suggested transferring control of farmland to the state in a corporatist system. His ideas blended modernized farming techniques, including scientific land-management practices, use of artificial manures, and grubbing out hedges to maximize land-usability, with anti-industrial “back-to-the-land” sentiments. Orwin’s ideas influenced many British Fascists to argue for a similar blending of ultra-modern and rural-nostalgic

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134 Ibid., 7.
135 Ibid., 2.
136 Ibid., 4, 17, 34.
tendencies in the 1930’s. Overall, his ideas found an audience among conservative intellectuals and among agriculturalists across the political spectrum.

Orwin’s proposals dramatically influenced Jenks’ philosophies on land management and agricultural reform. Jenks took the notion of state-controlled farming to heart and truly believed that the best way to save British agriculture was through a strong government-led effort to modernize the rural economy. Jenks had firsthand experience with advanced land management in New Zealand and familiarized himself with their system and the systems used in Canada, which were by his account more “extensive, efficient and rational” than Britain’s intensive farming practices. He wrote in a letter to The Times in 1929 that “it is surely better to have one family living in comfort on 500 acres [in the colonies] than five families living hand to mouth on what the colonial pointedly calls ‘cabbage patches.’”

Jenks knew that the agrarian economy needed reform and turned to politics to enact change. His personal experiences in New Zealand, struggles with depressed markets in the 1920’s, and his studies into the gross inefficiencies of the British farming system, convinced Jenks that new and strong political leadership was necessary to reform British agriculture. In the culmination of a process that began in the early 1920’s, he embraced Fascism.

Green turns to black: the rise of British Fascism

In response to what they saw as the overall degradation of British culture and society, Far-Right activists formed several Fascist political groups between the early

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1920’s and early 1930’s. During the height of the Great Depression, farmers and city workers were desperate for change. Above all else, Fascists wanted society to move forward through fusing nature with modernity, combining rural with urban aesthetics and strengthening feelings of nationalism. They also wanted action from their government and felt that democracy was too slow and too open to corruption from communists, foreign interests, and internal corruption, favoring “simpler” authoritarian government. In 1923, Rotha Lintorn-Orman created the British Fascist Party. Arnold Leese, a veterinary surgeon and Great War veteran, formed the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) in 1929. In 1930, William Sanderson created the English Mistery, which evolved into the English Array after 1936. Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF) eclipsed all other groups in size and influence after 1932.

These groups and others like them shared a “common thread” of a “rural-nostalgic and usually organicist theme” that informed their policies. This included the belief that “national regeneration” might be “achieved by a re-examination of the nation’s rural roots; a sort of revival of the agrarian tradition wherein lay the ‘true’ spiritual strength and cultural and moral values of the British people.” Although these groups disagreed over how exactly to achieve such regeneration, all held that returning to the land was key to saving British society from the Great Depression and the “symptoms of decay” that caused it. Going “back to the land” was a central tenet of British Fascist belief,

141 Ibid., 355.
informing many of the economic and social proposals of every British Fascist party from 1923 onward.\textsuperscript{142}

The British Fascist Party (1923-1934), also known as the British Fascisti or simply the British Fascists, was the first political group to self-identify as Fascist in Great Britain. Rotha Lintorn-Orman, the movement’s founder, served in the Women’s Volunteer Reserve of the Scottish Women’s Hospital Corps during the Great War, during which time her political views shifted towards radical nationalism and anti-communism.\textsuperscript{143} She hated the growing influence of Labour in Parliament following the war, as she believed the party advocated class-struggle and internationalism, two Marxist tropes that she loathed.\textsuperscript{144} This hatred for the extreme Left drove Lintorn-Orman to found the British Fascists, drawing inspiration from Benito Mussolini’s March on Rome.\textsuperscript{145} Her group served as a minority wing within the Conservative Party for most of its existence, attracting radicals and pushing the Party further to the Right through monthly Town Halls and frequent written appeals to Conservative MPs. Economic pressures in the mid-1920’s from rural areas and from London’s manufacturing sector led to a general strike in 1926, during which the British Fascists played a key role in crushing any attempts from Marxist activists to create a “Second Bolshevik Revolution.”\textsuperscript{146}

The BF’s message was essentially the same as the Conservative Party’s. Yet Lintorn-Orman was personally drawn to Fascism because she felt that the current democratic system was too slow to create meaningful change and too open to internal

\begin{footnotes}
\item[142] Gottlieb and Linehan, \textit{The Culture of Fascism}.
\item[146] Thurlow, \textit{Fascism in Britain}, 54.
\end{footnotes}
corruption. The British Fascists attracted many Far-Right conservatives who also identified the need for more action-oriented government, including Arnold Leese and William Joyce. The party’s exact membership is unknown, as the British Fascists notoriously falsified their numbers. In 1926 they claimed over 200,000 members, a figure that historian Richard Thurlow called “ridiculous.” Yet the party did have several thousand members in the mid-1920’s and established the Fascist Far-Right as a factor in British conservative politics during the decade.

Fear of internationalism and communism, mistrust of liberalism and industrialism, and a desire to rejuvenate national strength all defined the British Fascist platform. The British Fascists attempted to combat their fears and accomplish their goals by promoting many traditionally Conservative views, such “loyalty to the king, anti-trade union legislation, free trade within the Empire and a general preference for rural interests.” Yet the party complimented these views with Fascist-inspired policies such as restricting voting rights, purification of the “Anglo-Saxon Race” via immigration restrictions, and monitoring immigrant activities.

Arnold Leese believed that the British Fascists were still too far to the Left of the political spectrum and too willing to tolerate democratic discourse. He called the BF “conservatism with knobs on.” In 1928, he split from the British Fascists, and in 1929 formed the Imperial Fascist League (IFL). One of Leese’s motivations in leaving the British Fascists was his displeasure in the party’s response to the Great Depression. He

148 Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 54.
149 Martin Pugh, Hurrah for the Blackshirts!, 56, 58.
150 Griffiths, Fellow Travelers of the Right, 86.
argued that a party willing to tolerate the democratic system that caused the Great War and Depression was too weak to enact real change. Although the British Fascists blamed the Depression on liberalism and international capitalism, Leese took this argument beyond logic and blamed the Great Depression on an “international Jewish conspiracy” motivated by “moneyed interests.”

Even among Fascists, Leese was an extremist. The IFL was authoritarian and anti-Semitic, denouncing democratic liberalism and proposing eugenic practices to cleanse British society of foreign and Jewish blood. Leese also embraced the same rural-first thinking that drove Jorian Jenks and the Far-Right to denounce industrial damages to British farmers and British land. Although his party focused primarily on racial “threats” to British national strength, Leese corresponded with A. K. Chesterton, Viscount Lymington, William Sanderson and Rolf Gardiner as they founded the English Mistery and later English Array, suggesting he shared their interest in promoting farming as part of his Fascist vision.

William Sanderson, an active IFL member, founded the English Mistery in 1930 as a way to explore his “vision of leadership,” which included anti-democratic authoritarianism. He was so aggressively anti-modern and pro-rural that his movement called for abandoning industrial capitalism and returning to the Feudal System. Sanderson attributed his radical anti-modernism to the Great War’s environmental

152 Ibid., 21, 23.
154 Griffiths, Fellow Travelers of the Right, 100.
156 Linehan, British Fascism, 141.
destruction and the Great Depression’s economic ruination. These experiences, when coupled with romanticization of England’s pre-industrial past, convinced Fascist thinkers in the English Mistery that a system based on lordship and serfdom was more desirable than industrial capitalism and urbanization.

Sanderson’s Mistery attracted Lord Viscount Lymington, Rolf Gardiner, and A. K. Chesterton. These men agreed with Sanderson’s anti-industrialism and sought to bring greater attention to agricultural concerns. Lymington and Gardiner had prior experience in husbandry, farming, and agricultural work and promoted smarter farming practices. The Mistery also promoted organic farming and better treatment for farmers and livestock. However, Sanderson disagreed with Lymington’s political methodology, favoring a more Fascistic authoritarian approach to activism, while the latter believed that he could promote agricultural improvements without such dramatic political upheavals.

Lymington left the Mistery and formed the English Array in 1936, taking with him most of the Mistery’s membership, including Rolf Gardiner, A. K. Chesterton, and BUF officer J. F. C. Fuller. In the English Array, these activists honed their political message and discussed how to better achieve agricultural reform and land conservation, promoting “back-to-the-land” policies. While still Far-Right in its sympathies, the English Array represented a distilling of the ruralist, anti-industrial, and ecological threads that existed in the Fascist parties of the 1920’s and early 1930’s. The Array sought to bring “Pro-Nazi” philosophies to agrarian politics and aimed to reform British

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158 Linehan, British Fascism, 143.
160 Ibid., vii.
rural economics via Fascist authoritarian policies. Fuller, for instance, proposed that the British government adopt the same *Reichserbhofgesetz* (“Land Heritage Law” or State Hereditary Farm Law of 1933) that Nazi Germany enacted to protect farmland from Jews by declaring that only those possessing “Aryan blood” and their descendants could own land. \(^{161}\) In theory, entailments—strict hereditary land laws and fees—had been a central aspect of English rural life for centuries, codified in English Common Law since at least 1285. \(^{162}\) Yet the English Array wanted to use the ancient practice of entailments in a racially-motivated manner.

The most prominent Briton during this period who promoted Nazi-inspired land practices was Rolf Gardiner. Gardiner believed that Fascism was Europe’s future. He entered the 1920’s as a socialist, supporting guild-socialism and Social Credit policies. \(^{163}\) Yet it was his search for “masculine brotherhood,” brought on via his involvement in the “folk revival” naturist movements of the 1920’s in Britain and Germany, that attracted him to Fascism. \(^{164}\) Gardiner wrote in 1932 that he believed every country needed its own form of fascism to “redeem it from the muddle and formlessness into which scientific liberalism and homogenous democracy have betrayed the human soul.” \(^{165}\)

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\(^{163}\) Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 143.


Gardiner learned about Fascism through contacts in the German Artaman League, a *Voelkisch* youth group committed to returning German people to the land.\(^{166}\) Although he never joined the British Union of Fascists, criticizing the movement in 1933 as “the Union Jack plus football crowds plus the greyhound racing industry,” his ideas regarding nature, rural conservation, and “Blood and Soil” ideology played formative roles in shaping British Fascist beliefs on these subjects in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s.\(^{167}\)

Social changes, fears, and pressures after World War I contributed immensely to the rise of Far-Right movements in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the Great Depression’s lowest point, from 1929 to 1933, gave rise to a larger Fascist movement, one that legitimately “possessed the political leadership and potential” to gain Parliamentary influence in the 1930s, and scared members of Parliament on the Right and Left due to it’s sudden popularity: the British Union of Fascists.\(^{168}\)

Sir Oswald Mosley jumped into politics in 1918 after serving all four years in World War I.\(^{169}\) Initially a Conservative, Mosley was above all else anti-war and had a falling out with the Tories over the use of Black and Tans to combat the IRA.\(^{170}\) Mosley switched to the Labour Party in 1924, where he earned the reputation as a powerful and occasionally reckless speaker. The *Westminster Gazette* called him “the most polished literary speaker in the Commons, words flow from him in graceful epigrammatic phrases that have a sting in them for the government and the Conservatives. To listen to him is an education in the English language, also in the art of delicate but deadly repartee. He has

\(^{166}\) Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 135.
\(^{168}\) Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, 58.
\(^{169}\) Mosley, *My Life*, 151.
\(^{170}\) Ibid., 162.
human sympathies, courage and brains."  

Mosley was an extremely charismatic politician, but he made enemies due to his fiery rhetoric and radical notions.  

In 1926, he developed the Birmingham Proposals. These were dramatic economic changes that if enacted would have limited free trade, nationalized industries and initiated numerous public works projects designed to clean London’s streets and waterways, stimulate farm production and dramatically reduce unemployment. The Birmingham Proposals formed the core of Mosley’s politics until his death in 1980 and were the basis for most of his early economic initiatives in the BUF. Yet by 1929 it became clear to Mosley that the Labour Party would not support his plans. After Labour rejected his “Mosley Memorandum,” in which he expounded upon his Birmingham Proposals and demanded immediate action from Parliament, Mosley resigned and formed the New Party.  

The New Party “inclined toward fascist policies” but was denied a chance to establish itself due to the Great Depression’s effect on the 1931 elections. Voter participation was down and both the Conservative and Labour Parties took seats from the Liberals. Mosley’s New Party lost all the seats their members had held prior to joining and won no new seats. After the New Party’s failure, Mosley travelled to Italy to study what he called the “new movements” in European politics, befriending Benito Mussolini  

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172 Mosley, *My Life*, 166.  
173 Ibid., 190.  
175 Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 74.  
and embracing Fascism as “Britain’s new direction.”

When Mosley returned to Britain in 1932, he reorganized the New Party and recruited other fascist and right-wing groups to form the British Union of Fascists. Above all else, Mosley wanted to raise Britain out of the “cumbersome, unproductive, damaging failures of liberalism” and the “gluttony” of the global economy to craft “a greater Britain.” Fascism, he believed, was the key to achieving this.

The BUF’s ideologies shared many of the same themes as Far-Right groups in the 1920’s. Fear of losing British national identity, mistrust of industrialism and liberalism, psychological and physical scars from the Great War experience, the Victorian-era desire to return to the land, the propagation of the “Merrie England” myth, anti-Semitism and eugenic pseudo-science all informed the BUF’s policies. Those that supported any one of these ideas found reason to join the party in the early 1930’s, making the BUF into a “catch-all” for Far-Right intellectuals. This ideological diversity made the BUF more popular initially, but eventually threatened to destroy the party from within. It was after significant internal upheaval that Mosley would simplify his message and return to core tenants within the BUF’s platform: prevent another Great War and revitalize the rural economy.

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CHAPTER II: BRITAIN’S GREEN BLACKSHIRTS, 1932-1940

According to his critics, Oswald Mosley was a political pragmatist and an opportunist with an inflated sense of self-importance. When compared to contemporary British fascists Jorian Jenks, Rolf Gardiner, and Henry Williamson, Mosley’s interest in ecological and agricultural problems was limited at best. Yet he understood the importance that land, farming, and conservation issues held for many of his supporters. Land, nature, and farming were widely appealing concerns during the 1930’s, and the fact that the BUF supported these areas of interest helped keep them politically and socially relevant throughout its existence (1932-1940), despite unpopular racist and authoritarian tendencies.

This chapter will examine how and why Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists and other activists of the Far Right engaged agrarian, land, and nature conservation issues during the 1930’s. Reestablishing the spiritual connection between nature and humanity, which many on the Right felt had deteriorated since the Industrial Revolution and especially since World War I, was a central aim for many land-minded BUF members. For Mosley, the rejuvenation of the rural economy was a pillar of his economic platform in the Party’s early years. Although William Joyce incorporated Nazi-inspired “Blood and Soil” ideology into the BUF platform, these policies proved unpopular and the party abandoned them after 1936. Overall, British Fascists in the

1930’s engaged land, farming, and conservation issues because these issues resonated with groups that they hoped to attract. Yet those on the Far-Right most dedicated to these issues, including men such as Jorian Jenks, Henry Williamson, and Rolf Gardiner, genuinely hoped to reconnect society to the land and nature for economic, social, and spiritual reasons.

1932-1934: The BUF’s early policies & divisions within the far right

As the BUF’s leader, Mosley’s agricultural plans were rooted heavily in his economic goals. He believed that committing more capital to improving agriculture and urban public works projects were key to reversing the Great Depression and solving unemployment, and his conviction that improving British agriculture would stimulate national pride and unity. Mosley saw the environment as a means through which he could stimulate economic growth. In his mind, Fascism presented the best path to achieving such growth and would allow him to implement his policies more readily once Britain’s political system was sufficiently “streamlined.”  

Fascist authoritarianism offered Mosley a chance to impose his economic and political goals because in a “simplified democracy” there would be less of the opposition that he faced during his years in the Conservative and Labour parties.

In The Greater Britain (1932), his personal manifesto, Mosley outlined his overall platform for the British Union of Fascists. He tapped into several of the “mobilising passions” that historian Robert Paxton identified, especially when Mosley portrayed

\[\text{\^{\text{Ibid.}}, 62.}\]

\[\text{A. Raven Thompson, The Coming Corporate State (London: Black House, 1937), 22.}\]
Britain as a “victim” of the global capitalist market. Mosley believed that Britain was in the midst of a rapid social decline, and pointed to declining resource use and production in Britain as opposed to increased production in other countries as a reason why: “In the great Free Trade theory of the last century…all nations were to produce the products which they were fitted by nature to produce…each nation is striving hard to make itself as nearly as possible a self-contained economic unit…We have to face…that our foreign markets are inevitably shrinking.”

Mosley’s central point was simple. It resonated with Brits struggling under the Great Depression’s weight: each nation is gifted with certain natural resources and Britain had been gifted with the proper climate and workforce to best utilize foreign resources. However, as each country within the Empire sought economic self-sufficiency, these resources became less and less available to Britain and thus the nation’s economy suffered. Britain became a victim of its own reliance on foreign markets. Compounding this struggle, in Mosley’s mind, was a compliant government; “Ministers and the City were so busy helping every country except their own…Can we then be surprised at the present condition of Britain, when to all our natural handicaps in the new world was added this additional burden by Governments who acted with the customary subservience of all political Parties to the alien power within the state?” In his eyes, this “alien power within the state” was comprised of foreign capitalists who were allegedly draining Britain’s finances and natural resources through global trade, wealthy non-Britons who held sway over MPs through their capital, and wealthy Jewish families. For Mosley, the

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183 Mosley, Greater Britain, 41.
184 Ibid., 54.
only rational solution to ridding the state of these “leeches” was a strong fascist government which would put “Britain first” in all things.\(^{185}\) Mosley planned to “insulate” Britain from the world economy and keep colonial goods and natural resources exclusively within the Empire’s borders. His policies stressed eliminating urban unemployment through extensive public works projects, several of which promised to “cleanse London’s dirtied streets” and “make Norfolk’s farms the most productive in the Isles once more.”\(^{186}\) Overall, his plans promoted national strength and rejuvenation.

Mosley’s pro-agrarian views and opinions on nature in general were intimately intertwined with his economic views. Nature was every country’s gifted resource and how each country used nature was their intended role within the world economy. Britain, dependent on foreign resources for so long, had neglected her own natural resources and allowed her colonies to become more self-reliant instead of “supporting the homeland.”\(^{187}\) Traditional democracy had failed to reverse the damage and had taken Britain down a path toward economic disaster; Fascism, Mosley promised, would reverse these economic trends, make British farms and industries “rationalised” and productive, and improve urban and rural environments by raising living standards, eliminating unemployment and cleansing the streets, air and waterways.\(^{188}\)

While these proposals were idealistic, even Utopian, as historian Philip Coupland said, they reflected policies that Mosley had seen work in the United States and in Italy. Isolationism had worked for a time in the U.S. after World War I; the U.S. also proposed

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\(^{185}\) Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* (London: Balder, 1938), 1.  
\(^{186}\) Mosley, *Greater Britain*, 81-83.  
public land and water works as a solution to unemployment during the early 1930s, including the Hoover Dam and what would become the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) under Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal; and Italy had already undertaken major public works projects by the time Mosley visited with Mussolini in 1931-32. Mosley did not craft these ideas in a vacuum, but was merely suggesting what he felt were proven policies.

These policies tapped into an emotional well among British citizens. Since Mosley was a well-known politician by 1932, The Greater Britain reached a wide reading audience; The Daily Mail even endorsed Mosley multiple times during these early stages and featured chapters of his book in long-form articles. Mosley’s call for a strong, simplified central government and for new economic strategies centered on using British land and resources to stimulate job growth appealed to tens of thousands of voters. He also proposed an end to tithing of farmers, a policy that Parliament had begun in the late-1920’s which suppressed the rural economy during an already difficult depression. Many of London’s unemployed laborers and struggling rural farmers flocked to the BUF in 1932 and 1933, while aristocrats who were displeased with the country’s direction also found Mosley’s party appealing. Most notorious among the British elite to support the BUF was King Edward VIII, who briefly reigned from January 20th to December 11th, 1936, before abdicating to marry the “woman he loved,” Wallis Sampson. Edward viewed Fascism as an effective bulwark against Communism,

189 Thompson, The Coming Corporate State, 49.  
191 S. Dorril, Blackshirt — Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism (London: Penguin, 2007), 413. 
supported appeasement of Nazi Germany during and after his reign, and privately endorsed the BUF in 1937.\textsuperscript{193}

Eliminating unemployment, stimulating domestic economic production and cleansing Britain’s urban environments were policies that people supported even before the Great Depression, and Mosley presented an attractive “alternative” to finally achieve these lofty goals.\textsuperscript{194} It did not matter that Mosley had likely never seen the Australians dressed in “cloth of uncertain quality” or been to any of the other countries that he wrote so confidently about; nor did it matter that his belief that every country had its “natural place” within the global market was an overly simplistic viewpoint. What mattered was that Mosley’s economic and environmental views tapped into Britain’s insecurities, which the Great Depression had exasperated.

“Feelings propel fascism more than thought does;” this was as true in Britain as in Italy, Spain or Germany.\textsuperscript{195} Citizens were upset that Britain’s economy, society and physical environments appeared to be in decline due to political ineptitude and cultural decadence. Mosley took advantage of these emotions and rallied 50,000 men and women to his cause by 1934. He sold his ideas to the masses through his writings, his rhetorical prowess and his connections in political and press circles. Lord Rothermere, owner of \textit{The Daily Mail} and Mosley’s close friend, ran the headline “Hurrah for the Blackshirts!” on the front page of the 19 January, 1934 issue and included a 12-page summary of Mosley’s goals, a move which gave the BUF one of its largest surges in membership.\textsuperscript{196}

\textsuperscript{193} Pugh, \textit{Blackshirts!}, 164.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{195} Paxton, “Five Stages of Fascism,” 6.
\textsuperscript{196} Rothermere, “Hurrah,” 1-12.
In this early period, Mosley’s philosophy defined the direction and mindset of the British Union of Fascists because he created a platform that his audience responded to emotionally. His followers accepted his agricultural policies, consisting of using nature and Imperial resources for economic gain while improving domestic environments, as rational responses to real problems that they had experienced on a daily basis for decades. Mosley proposed a high minimum wage for agricultural workers so that farmers could more easily profit from their labor, high tariffs on non-Imperial food imports, and redirecting colonial food exports intended for other nations so that they went exclusively to Britain. British farms would produce food for Britain first, and then export exclusively to the colonies, thus making the British Empire's agricultural economy completely insular.\textsuperscript{197} The idea was that by shrinking the overall market, British farmers would face less competition for their goods and could more easily sell their products at a profitable rate.\textsuperscript{198} British farmers and rural citizens had long felt ignored and under-supported by their Parliamentary representatives, and Mosley’s policies appealed to their feelings of resentment. These policies, which aimed to strengthen the nation and the Empire, were not the only reasons why people joined Mosley’s party from 1932 to 1934, but they reinforced Mosley’s Fascist, imperialist and nationalist philosophies and helped define the BUF in the public’s mind during this period as “a radical though seemingly well-intentioned coalition.”\textsuperscript{199}

Despite the BUF’s early notoriety, Mosley’s coalition never united Britain’s Far Right. Several groups that predated the BUF rejected Mosley’s overtures to join his party,
citing his poor attempts to emulate an archetypal Fascist strongman, a la Mussolini or Adolf Hitler. Some, like Arnold Leese, rejected Mosley’s leadership due to ideological differences regarding anti-Semitism in party philosophy and Mosley’s lack of emphasis on it. Others, like Rolf Gardiner, rejected Mosley’s party because they felt he did not go far enough in emphasizing rural economic and social issues. Mosley’s attempts to make the BUF a party for all on the political Right meant that there was more opportunity for political in-fighting over one issue or another. Mosley’s central selling-point was Fascism for a Greater Britain, but not everyone agreed on what Fascism was or what policies a Fascist government should implement. Mosley’s failure to recognize this reality of coalition-building undermined his efforts.

Although a majority of the British Fascisti’s estimated 6,000 members joined the New Party between 1931 and 1932, with more joining in 1933 after the New Party became the BUF, most of the British Fascisti’s female members rejected Mosley and continued to operate independently until the party finally collapsed in 1934 due to financial and political bankruptcy.²⁰⁰ Rotha Lintorn-Orman never trusted Mosley and had identified him as a “dangerous socialist” when he was an MP in 1927.²⁰¹ Her lieutenant, Neil Francis Hawkins, led the British Fascisti splinter faction that joined Mosley, a move which earned him a high position within the BUF.²⁰² The split left only the “most radical” members behind to keep the party afloat.²⁰³ Lintorn-Orman and her followers wanted a strong leader truly committed to the fascist platform and in their eyes, Mosley was a far

cry from Mussolini. Yet Mosley himself never appeared interested in gaining their trust. In 1933, Mosley dismissed the party as “three old ladies and a couple of office boys.” Ironically, he made this insult just days before a group of British Fascist officers heckled the BUF headquarters in London, to the point where Mosley sent a BUF fighting squad to wreck Lintorn-Orman’s offices in retaliation.204 In the case of the British Fascisti, Mosley’s lack of strong leadership created divisions within Britain’s Fascist movement.

Arnold Leese also rejected Mosley’s leadership outright. Mosley showed interest in merging the Imperial Fascist League under the BUF’s banner, sending his officer Robert Forgan to negotiate a merger between the IFL and BUF in 1932.205 Although Leese was initially open to the suggestion, once he met Mosley he knew that he could never join the BUF. Leese wanted Mosley to make anti-Semitism and racially-motivated law central themes of BUF policy, yet Mosley was reluctant to make such a change for fear of alienating the more moderate fascists within his coalition.206 Leese immediately began smearing Mosley within public circles, calling him a “kosher fascist” and his party the “British Jewnion of Fascists.”207 Much like how he handled the British Fascisti, Mosley sent fighting squads to attack IFL headquarters on multiple occasions between 1933 and 1936, even sending a group disguised as communists to an IFL meeting and ransacking the building.208 Their rivalry would continue until both parties disbanded in 1940. The key disagreement between the IFL and BUF over anti-Semitism in 1932 stemmed from Leese’s belief that Jews and other races were biologically inferior to

204 Ibid., 37.
205 Dorril, Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley, 119.
206 Griffiths, Fellow Travelers of the Right, 96.
207 Ibid., 97.
208 Benewick, Political Violence and Public Order, 47.
Anglo-Saxons, while anti-Semites and racists within the BUF argued that Jews and other minorities held “hidden influence” within British society, manipulating the economic and political arenas.\textsuperscript{209} One brand was biological hate while the other was socio-economic hatred. Anti-Semitism eventually became a central aspect of BUF policy between 1934 and 1937, but it blended biological and socio-economic arguments rather than emphasizing one form of discrimination over the other.

Although many within both the English Mistery and English Array were also BUF members, including BUF officer J. F. C. Fuller, Rolf Gardiner rejected Mosley’s party for being too socially and agriculturally moderate. Gardiner believed, like Lintorn-Orman, that a strong fascist party required a strong leader with discipline and resolve, and Mosley was anything but strong and resolved in Gardiner’s view. Gardiner argued that the BUF, despite appealing to farmers via economic changes, did not place enough emphasis on creating the “rural revitalisation” that he believed was necessary to renew British society.\textsuperscript{210} Gardiner wrote in 1933 that Britain needed a social renewal “from the herb to the hymn,” and proposed a plan to “rebuild a hill-and-vale economy along modern organic lines,” restoring ancient breeds of sheep to the Downs of the English countryside and reviving rural industries as well as traditional rural harvest festivals.\textsuperscript{211}

This was a complete overhaul which rejected modern industrialism and capitalism. It was not a Utopian or Romantic vision of the British countryside, but a pragmatic plan to try and renew rural life.

\textsuperscript{209} Griffiths, \textit{Fellow Travelers of the Right}, 102-103.
Many of Gardiner’s designs appeared in the Rural Reconstruction Association’s *The Revival of Agriculture: a Constructive Policy for Britain* (1936). He held some sway within the association’s leadership, and it was through the RRA that Gardiner met L. F. Easterbrook, a far-right-leaning agriculturalist and protégé of Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher who promoted “spiritual science,” or the belief that the human spirit was as important as the physical world in shaping life, history, and society.²¹² He claimed that “the natural and spiritual worlds” were unified and that to ignore one would weaken the other.²¹³ Gardiner and Easterbrook both applied this form of spiritual exploration to the physical environment and rural life, denoting the mystical connection between farmer and farmland, between humanity and nature.²¹⁴

BUF policy-makers accepted many of Gardiner’s ideas, particularly those regarding spiritual links between humanity and the environment. Gardiner and Mosley agreed that the British government needed to do more to revitalize the countryside, both in physical terms and in socio-economic terms. Both also believed that the government needed to help revitalize “English stock” and strengthen English blood within British society.²¹⁵ The renewal of “English blood” was especially important to Gardiner, as he wanted to implement policies based loosely on Richard Walther Darré’s “Blood and Soil” ideology to strengthen the relationship between the countryside and the English people.²¹⁶ Although Gardiner never joined the BUF, his connections to the party through his friendships with J. F. C. Fuller, D. H. Lawrence, and Jorian Jenks meant that many of his

²¹⁴ “Organic Nationalism.”
ideas regarding the rural renewal of British society and the revitalization of English bloodlines found their way into BUF discourse and policy-making throughout the 1930’s. Yet it was not Gardiner, but another German sympathizer, who would bring “Blood and Soil” ideology into BUF policy.


William Joyce was a committed Nazi sympathizer and a top-ranking official within the BUF, initially named Director of Propaganda in 1934 and later Deputy Leader in 1935. He joined the Party in 1933 and immediately impressed members and audiences with his aggressive oratory skills; journalist Cecil Roberts described Joyce as, “thin, pale, intense, he had not been speaking many minutes before we were electrified by this man…so terrifying in its dynamic force, so vituperative, so vitriolic.”

Despite being a Brooklyn native and of Irish descent, Joyce was resolute in his commitment to the British Empire. Like Mosley, Joyce believed that fascism represented the best path for Britain to lift itself out of the Great Depression, which he blamed on “Capitalist greed” and the “parasitic” world market. However, where Mosley and Joyce differed was their preferred fascist model for building the BUF; while Mosley sought to replicate Italian Fascism and emphasize total economic renewal through corporatism, Joyce believed the BUF should emulate Nazi Germany. Joyce’s personal mantra was that “if you love your

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217 Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 111-12. Joyce eventually joined the NSDAP in 1940, after he fled Britain to escape arrest under Defense Regulation 18B and became a naturalized German citizen. In Germany, he ran a radio propaganda station under the pseudonym “Lord Haw-Haw,” for which he gained some fame. Allied forces captured him in May of 1945 and Britain executed him as traitor after the end of World War II.


country you are National. If you love your people, you are Socialist. Be a National Socialist."²²⁰

Joyce was attracted to Nazism because of Nazi Germany’s anti-Semitic policies. Joyce believed that the “Jew…is Britain’s single greatest internal threat.”²²¹ He was a “spiteful bigot,” considered so even by his contemporaries, and his angry rhetoric and personal magnetism pushed the BUF toward violence, anti-semitism, Nazism, and racist social and economic policies.²²² Joyce’s influence on the BUF’s agricultural policies from 1934 to 1937 “played no small part in marginalizing the British Union of Fascists,” as he injected explicit racial and anti-Semitic proposals into the Party’s land reform policies, suggesting a return to hereditary entailments for small farms and proposing that any “non-British,” in this sense meaning Jewish or foreign, landowners without British descendants be stripped of their farms and their lands given to “full-blooded” British citizens.²²³ Joyce kept no diaries and few written accounts, and only ever crafted a personal “manifesto” after fleeing Britain for Germany during World War II.²²⁴ Yet he wrote several articles and gave countless speeches during his time in the BUF. Within these sources he made clear that his views on land, people and nature were far less economically dependent than Mosley’s, but were founded on the same ideological principles that Nazi Germany called “Blood and Soil” (*Blut und Boden*).}

This philosophy’s origins extend back to the late 19th century in Germany and blends “racialism and national romanticism.” Ernst Moritz Arndt and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl were two prominent German agrarian romantics who argued “that peasantry represented the foundation of the German people.” This ideology, tying German national and racial identity to the land, was promoted in part to craft a deeper German history. By arguing that the “folk” (Volk) identity was rooted in the land itself, German writers could claim that their nation’s ancestry extended back to the Germanic tribes of Roman times and even further into the past. “Blood and Soil” was initially a way to fabricate national and racial solidarity in a land that had not experienced either in any significant form until 1871.

Richard Walther Darré coined the term “Blood and Soil” in his 1930 *A New Nobility Based on Blood and Soil* (*Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*). Darré proposed a “systematic eugenics program” and claimed that breeding could be a “cure-all” for state problems. Darré was key in promoting Nazism outside of German cities and was responsible for Nazi calls for “returning to the countryside” and the party’s idolization of the German farmer. Some Nazis also believed in a near-supernatural connection between German land and German blood; only those who really worked the land owned the land, and urban culture was weakened because of its disconnect from nature. Urban decadence and misuse of land was often thinly-veiled anti-Semitism, as Jews, who in this

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philosophy were not “of the land,” were responsible for urbanization and all of the problems that cities tended to have. This environmental ideology, which so intimately tied race, nation, and land, was an immense influence on Nazi policies in the 1930s and many of these arguments were used to justify the Holocaust.

Joyce saw the same connection between native racial identity and native landscapes as the Nazis saw in their own country. A lifelong anti-Semite, Joyce believed that Darré’s “Blood and Soil” ideologies closely described the “adverse” effects that Britain’s Jewish population had on the countryside and in urban centers. He also held that National Socialism, no matter where it arises, “must arise from the soil and people or not at all.” Joyce argued that Britain had lost its connection to the countryside because Jewish Capitalists had “torn” farmers “from the land to which they had belonged, robbed of their labour that gave their lives purpose and meaning.” Through National Socialism, Britain could return to the countryside and rejuvenate the farmers who were being crushed by the Great Depression and by “Jewish interests.”

Joyce’s ideas caught on within the BUF because of his imposing personality. He sold anti-Semitic notions of the British landscape as pro-nationalistic while combating anti-Fascist elements in British society with “absolute vigour.” While not all BUF leaders endorsed his perspective, Mosley trusted the direction that Joyce wanted to take the party and others fell in line behind him. Joyce believed that the only way for the BUF

233 Joyce, *Twilight*, 16.
236 Selwyn, *Hitler’s Englishman*, 56.
to overcome the Jewish “threat” to British blood and soil was to turn violent against the Jews. The BUF already had a reputation as a paramilitary group by the mid-1930s, as Oswald Mosley had instituted a black shirt military uniform for all active members since 1932 and the group had been involved in a number of violent rallies in 1933 and 1934.²³⁷ Joyce aimed at that aggression at Jews.

Yet London’s Jewish population fought back. Lord Rothermere was forced to pull support from the BUF in 1934 after a violent rally and because of alleged “pressure from Jewish advertisers,” while Jewish protestors crashed several BUF rallies, aiming to crush the Party’s support entirely.²³⁸ The BUF’s anti-Jewish campaign culminated in the 1936 “Battle of Cable Street,” during which Jewish and Far-Left protestors halted a BUF march through London’s East End and the two groups fought, injuring thousands.²³⁹ In the aftermath, Parliament passed the Public Order Act of 1936, which banned the wearing of political uniforms during marches and was aimed at the BUF to stifle its support entirely.²⁴⁰

In 1934, BUF membership peaked at over 50,000, with some estimates as high as 100,000. By 1936, that number had dropped to below 7,000.²⁴¹ William Joyce’s influence on the party had nearly driven the BUF to political extinction. Joyce had wrongly anticipated that Nazi racial and agricultural ideology would appeal in Britain as it had in Germany. His proposals, which blended romantic nationalism with racial identity and a blood-deep connection with the landscape and rural environments, drove middle-class

²³⁷ Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 95-97.
²³⁸ Joyce, Twilight, 18.
²³⁹ Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 99.
²⁴⁰ Pugh, Blackshirts, 188.
²⁴¹ Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 101.
voters away when they were used to justify violence and extreme anti-Semitism. Though he put Britain first just as Mosley had, Joyce excluded non-British people from his vision and this alienated the BUF from mainstream politics as his ideas caught on within the Party. Mosley never fully agreed with Joyce’s message or politics, but tacitly endorsed them by allowing Joyce to change the party from within.

Joyce moved the BUF’s emphasis away from what Brits found appealing about Fascism to begin with. Many liked the promise of a strong, streamlined government that would initiate massive public works projects to improve the environment and stimulate economic growth. Instead, the party sold vague, grandiose notions about British national identity being tied to the land and this identity being threatened by the Jewish specter. The Jew-as-scapegoat myth was far from a new argument in Britain or Germany by the 1930s, but where this argument appealed in Germany it fell flat in Britain.

The fact that the BUF became obsessed with anti-Semitism was a major factor in the party’s decline after 1934. While there were many anti-Semites on Britain's Far-Right and within British society as a whole during the 1930s, anti-Semitism was not nearly as important for British followers of Fascism as it was for German followers of Nazism. Germany had a long and deep-seated history of anti-Semitism extending back to the Middle Ages, and tensions between Jews and non-Jews had only increased during the twentieth century, even as German Jews became the most culturally integrated of any Jewish community in Europe.242 Nazism was the latest and most extreme in a long line of anti-Semitic German groups, such as Wilhelm Marr’s Anti-Semitic League founded in

1879. Anti-Semitic propaganda blaming Jews for Germany’s loss in World War I, known now as the “stab-in-the-back-myth” (Dolchstoßlegende), circulated from the end of the war in 1918 through the rise of the Nazi regime, leading many Germans to be more open to tolerating the Nazi Party’s anti-Jewish programs. British society in the 1930s was simply not as open to anti-Semitism because the country did not have the same history of anti-Jewish sentiment that German society had.

The BUF lost every seat that its members stood for in the 1936 local elections, polling at about 3 percent. Mosley chose to sit out national elections entirely, coining the slogan “Fascism Next Time,” meaning in 1940. It was only after Jorian Jenks and Henry Williamson rose to prominence within the party in 1937 that the BUF gained renewed popularity, largely because of its shift in emphasis towards natural preservation, rural renewal, and peace throughout Europe.

1937-1940: Jorian Jenks, Henry Williamson, & “spiritual ecologism”

In 1937, Mosley consolidated the BUF’s leadership, “eliminating redundancies” and sacking William Joyce in the process. After this point, the BUF leadership reimagined the party as an activist group, campaigning foremost against a war with Germany. Mosley “had always been anti-war and the abolition of war became his primary aim for the British Union,” at least according to his colleague A. Raven

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243 Ibid., 1.
245 Pugh, Blackshirts, 193.
246 Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 113.
247 Ibid., 191.
A driving motivation behind the BUF’s anti-war campaign was to avoid the awkward position of being a fascist party in a country at war with a fascist state. Yet the BUF developed a second motivation for avoiding war: the protection and restoration of Britain’s rural economy. The BUF became a heavily pro-farming, pro-rural, and pro-conservation party after 1937 due to Jorian Jenks’ and Henry Williamson’s influence on Oswald Mosley and the party as a whole.

Jenks joined the BUF in 1932 as a virtual unknown on the political stage, yet he had already made an impact on British agricultural policy. Jenks’ repeated arguments for protectionist policies that favored British farmers, published in *The Times* between April of 1930 and July of 1931, stirred popular support for increasing tariffs on all agricultural imports due in part to the difficult economic climate. In 1932, Neville Chamberlain of the Conservative Party, then Parliament’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, proposed the *Import Duties Act 1932*, which borrowed heavily from Jenks’ proposals and introduced a general 10 percent tariff on all imports, exempting British Imperial foodstuffs and some raw materials. The Act passed with unanimous opposition from Labour and 31 additional Liberals. The Tory government hoped that the tariffs would restart Britain's economy, but the exclusion of Imperial foodstuffs from the tariff, a move that Jenks did not support but was aimed at preventing the possibility of food shortages, failed to

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248 Thompson, *The Coming Corporate State*, 72.
251 Ibid., 439.

Jenks’ ideas also gained notoriety and influence during the British Empire Economic Conference, held in Ottawa, Canada, between July 21st and August 20th, 1932. The meeting included the Prime Ministers, Finance Ministers, and select delegates from The United Kingdom and eight dominions of the British Empire, including Canada, Australia, South Africa and India.\footnote{“British Empire Economic Conference,” \textit{Time}, July 25, 1932, 12.} The leaders discussed the adverse impacts of the Great Depression on the British Empire’s economy and shared many ideas, strategies and proposals to fix the Imperial economic structure.\footnote{Ibid., 14.} Ultimately, the conference concluded that the Empire would work to establish limited tariffs within the Empire and very high tariffs with the rest of the world, a move that directly echoed BUF’s proposals for an insulated Imperial economy earlier that same year.\footnote{Moore-Colyer, “Towards ‘Mother Earth,’” 370.} This was known at the time as “Imperial Preference,” or “Empire Free-Trade,” founded on the principals that each country was to become “home producers first, empire producers second, and foreign producers last.”\footnote{Robert A. McKay, “Imperial Economics at Ottawa,” \textit{Pacific Affairs} 5:10 (Oct. 1932): 880.} Versions of Empire Free-Trade theory first appeared during the Great Depression in C. S. Orwin’s \textit{The Future of Farming} (1929), appeared again in Mosley’s \textit{The Greater Britain} (1932), and informed many of Jenks’ economic arguments during the early 1930’s. Their ideas were politically popular in conservative, far-right, and rural circles, and directly inspired Imperial economic policy in the early 1930s.
Jenks formally started his political career in 1932 by hosting “garden parties” in Suffolk for his farming friends and his associates within the Agricultural department. During these, he would argue for Fascist economic policies as beneficial for agrarian interests and fundraise for the BUF. Jenks also contributed to *The Times* and to the BUF’s journals, *Action, Blackshirt*, and *British Fascist Quarterly*, between 1932 and 1939, appearing under the pseudonym *Vergilius*, gaining notoriety among general readers and BUF officers for his impassioned rhetoric and thorough explanations as to how Britain’s rural economic struggles related directly to its position in the global capitalist market. Jenks called himself a “critic of the modern economy” and regularly attacked capitalism for destroying Britain’s rural markets and the farmers’ way of life.

After the BUF internally reorganized in 1937, Jenks became the party’s Agricultural Minister. He assumed full control over the party’s agrarian policies and proposed that the party totally pursue the revitalization of the rural economy. Jenks outlined his strategy in *The Land and the People* (1937), the party’s official agricultural policy. Over the course of eight pages, Jenks detailed the reasons why rural revitalization was necessary and explained how the BUF proposed to fix long-standing agrarian problems. He argued that “for at least sixty years Britain’s agriculture has been going downhill. Since 1870, when the flood of imports first assumed formidable dimensions, we have lost no less than 6 million acres of ploughland, including 4 million acres of

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cereals...This tragic decline is not due to natural causes.”  

Jenks claimed that the “blight which hangs over the countryside” was the “blight of persistent and deliberate neglect on the part of those responsible for our economic policy. No nation has a greater need of a productive agriculture; no nation has made less effort to achieve it.”  

Jenks argued that through strong leadership, authoritarian action, and direct government intervention into the rural economy, the BUF would rejuvenate rural life and make the agricultural sector productive and profitable for the nation and for small farmers.  

Jenks made clear the reasons why he believed none in the Socialist Left, the Conservative Right, or the Liberal center had successfully achieved rural revitalization. He claimed that “neither Conservatives nor Socialists (much less the Liberals) really desire a revival of agriculture, because the resulting expansion of output would seriously embarrass influential supporters with foreign investments and conflict with the theory of international trade to which they subscribe.”  

He added that their agricultural policies were “therefore mere appendages, furbished up at election-time in order to attract the rural vote, and then conveniently forgotten. The British Union alone sees agriculture in its true significance as the corner-stone of a national edifice which shall stand four square to all the winds that blow.”  

He appealed to those who felt ignored or disillusioned by Parliament’s lackluster agricultural policies of the 1920s and 1930s.  

Jenks established four goals for the BUF to achieve, all aimed at revitalizing rural life and the nation as a whole. These goals were to firstly, “increase enormously the

261 Ibid., 1.  
263 Jenks, The Land and the People, 3.  
264 Ibid., 3.
proportion of fresh home-grown food in the national diet, and thus place the national health on an altogether sounder basis”; then to “remove our present alarming dependence on imported food, thus easing greatly our financial position and lightening the problem of national defence”; next, “expand internal trade by at least £600 million a year, a sum which will amply compensate for any resulting loss in foreign trade, and in fact go far to make good our past losses in this direction,” which he claimed would “give all industries greater stability and make possible a progressive rise in the standard of living”; and lastly “create a healthy, permanent employment on the land for at least half a million more breadwinners, which will automatically mean employment in industry and transport for another half million. A million families can be lifted from the dole and given economic security.”

To achieve each of these goals, Jenks created eight “practical proposals” that, if implemented, would benefit the rural farmer. They were:

(a) Increased consumer purchasing power: i.e. a larger market (for farming goods).
(b) Drastic control of imports: i.e. a secure market for
(c) Stable prices and improved distribution: i.e. an orderly market (for farm products).
(d) Industrial self-government to ensure fair-play between employer and employee, producer and consumer.
(e) Special banking facilities to provide cheap capital
(f) Better housing, wages and opportunities for farm workers.
(g) Adequate machinery for conserving the land and ensuring its full utilisation,
(h) A systematic policy of increasing the number of small family farms.

Jenks also knew that the first step in rural revitalization was to reverse the long-term trend of low food prices, the “prime cause of agricultural depression.” He argued

\[265\] Ibid., 3.
\[266\] Ibid., 3.
\[267\] Ibid., 4.
that “politicians who cannot see beyond the next election, and economists who are not themselves producers, always advocate forcing down prices to meet the lowest incomes, i.e. a ‘cheap food’ policy, which is incidentally a ‘cheap labour’ policy.” Jenks and Mosley advocated for “raising the lowest incomes to meet a fair level of prices, i.e. a ‘high wage’ policy.” He claimed that “such a policy is not feasible under a system of price-cutting, international competition and restrictive finance, but will be perfectly possible when we break out of that vicious circle and concentrate on developing production and stimulating consumption within the Empire, beginning, of course, with Britain itself.”

He also argued for strict import controls and the establishment of an “Agricultural Land Bank” that would reduce farm debt, as well as an “Agricultural Corporation” that would fix prices and operate in unison with the BUF’s overall corporatist economy. He also proposed that any landowner seen as “misusing their land,” meaning farmers who had extremely low yields, poor quality produce, used techniques that stripped the land of its fertility, or sat on derelict land, would be subject to “compulsory purchase” via government intervention, with a “Volunteer Land Army” used to restore the purchased land.

Overall, Jenks planned to turn the British economy into one driven primarily by rural interests, rather than one in which city centers dictated to farmers. He fought to strengthen the bond between humanity and soil, which he called “spiritual ecologism,” through his policy proposals. Jenks’ “spiritual ecologism” resembled Darré’s themes of

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268 Ibid., 4.
269 Moore-Colyer, “Towards ‘Mother Earth,’” 368.
270 Ibid., 369.
271 Ibid., 371.
“Blood and Soil” in the fact that it stressed a mystical connection between nation, land, and people, but they differed from Darré’s ideas due to Jenks’ minimization of race in his philosophy. He also rationalized and put into writing the land policies that many in the BUF and many more on the Far-Right had advocated since the early twentieth century, such as limiting foreign agricultural imports, raising agricultural minimum wages, and improving rural housing and farm infrastructure. His plans also put in relatively practical economic terms the same spiritual connection between the British people and British land that Rolf Gardiner and others had described in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Jenks believed as much as Gardiner did in the link between national spirit and the land, but as a political activist, he stressed the aspects of that relationship that government could realistically influence. Instead of describing intangible connections between society and nature, between national spirit and natural spirit, Jenks focused on the tangible links between food quality and national health between soil erosion and quality of farmland, and between global economic forces and the viability of British farming.

Jenks’ proposals helped redefine and re-popularize the BUF’s social and economic policies from 1937 to 1940, minimizing anti-Semitism and committing greater energy toward agrarian issues that the Far-Right’s political base had found important for decades. Many of his policies, although never enacted, influenced Conservative lawmakers in British government and inspired many of the government’s emergency actions taken during World War II to control the rural economy.272 His agrarian activism drew hundreds of new supporters from the surrounding countryside, with one garden

party in 1938 holding as many as 1,400 guests. After the BUF dissolved in 1940, the spiritual ecology that he pursued during the late 1930s defined his postwar career and the philosophical direction of many British ecologists in the years after World War II.

Henry Williamson also became an important voice within the BUF in 1937, joining the party that year and quickly gaining respect within party leadership as an advocate for Fascism and nature conservation. He incorporated more romantic and utopian views of nature into BUF ideology, proving the most significant proponent of nature preservation in the party. While Jenks made land and agrarian issues the party’s primary economic priorities, Williamson helped make nature, the mystical connection between humanity and the land, and an anti-war message primary focuses of party rhetoric in the Party’s final three years.

Williamson felt that he could separate British anti-Nazi propaganda from what he “knew the German people to be,” and thus had no problem accepting National Socialism as a favorable model for Britain to follow. Like Gardiner and Joyce, Williamson believed in ideas similar to Nazi “Blood and Soil” ideology, but he was not as staunch an anti-Semite as Joyce was. During a 1935 trip to Nuremberg, Williamson remarked that he “saw a racial community based on the values of land and a revived peasantry, freed from banker's interest, guaranteed from foreclosure, and the pioneering conservation laws and projects.” Williamson “saw in the faces of the German people expressiveness and confidence that looked as if they were “breathing extra oxygen.” In the Hitler Youth,

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273 Dorril, Blackshirt, 278.
276 Ibid.
reminiscent of his days as a Boy Scout, Williamson saw “the former pallid leer of hopeless slum youth transformed into the suntan, the clear eye, the broad and easy rhythm of the poised young human being.” Nazi Germany represented “a race that moves on poles of mystic, sensual delight. Every gesture is a gesture from the blood, every expression a symbolic utterance. Everything is of the blood, of the senses…The spirit of the farm and what I was trying to do there, was the spirit of Oswald Mosley. It was all part of the same battle.”

In *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* (1940), which he wrote while owning his own farm in Norfolk from 1937 to 1939, Williamson wrote extensively about the environmental damages that Britain’s path had caused: “Rats, weeds, swamps, depressed markets, labourers on the dole, rotten cottages, polluted streams, political parties and class divisions, wealthy banking and insurance houses getting rid of their land mortgages and investing their millions abroad (but not in the empire), this was the real England…”

Later in his career, in *The Phoenix Generation* (1965), he expressed his vision through Philip Maddison, the returned soldier, his generation denied the “land fit for heroes” that politicians had promised: “...When the soil's fertility is being conserved instead of raped, when village life is a social unity, when pride of craftsmanship returns, when everyone works for the sake of adding beauty and importance to life, when every river is clean and bright… Then my country will be good enough for me.”

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277 Ibid.  
His stance was Utopian in tone, but like Mosley and others on the British Far-Right, Williamson was responding to legitimate environmental problems that had existed for decades. Taking after the romantic conservationists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Williamson urged Englishmen to be aware of these troubles and seek answers to them. In his mind, Fascism represented the best political solution because of his perceptions of Nazi Germany’s environmental successes in contrast with Britain’s failures.

Williamson was drawn to Fascism in the early 1930s because he believed in Oswald Mosley’s public works projects and believed that the BUF could do even more to promote renewing the countryside and conserving the nation’s natural environments. He was one of the few prominent members of British society to join the BUF after Joyce’s damaging period and was committed to restoring the party with Mosley in 1937. When the BUF adopted an anti-war activist stance after 1937, Williamson fully supported the move, claiming that “Hitler desires nothing more than peace with Britain.” He justified the BUF’s position in his writings by claiming that war with Germany would inevitably “diminish our people, blacken our skies, poison our rivers, and scorch our once beautiful countryside.”

War preparations and industry poisoning the environment became a significant element of the BUF’s anti-war argument. Although there was no fighting on the British Isles during World War I, the conflict had drastically polluted the air and consumed the home front’s natural resources including timber, coal, steel and water. Deforestation was

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281 “The Henry Williamson Society.”
such a significant problem that husbandry clubs appeared throughout the 1920’s, planting millions of trees between 1920 and 1940. Yet their efforts, while noble, replaced less than 10 percent of the total forest area lost from 1914 to 1918.\textsuperscript{283} Even if the fighting never came to England itself, the natural devastation from mobilization was so damaging that it made war unpalatable.\textsuperscript{284}

Williamson and Mosley bonded over their shared pacifism. In a correspondence between the two, Mosley wrote that “we must continue to press for peace at any cost,” otherwise he, Williamson, and all Brits stood to lose their land, empire and potentially their lives.\textsuperscript{285} Williamson’s writings and anti-war, pro-nature message resonated with Brits who were fearful of war and upset over the damages that the status quo had already brought upon British environments. From 1937 to its dissolution in 1940, the BUF saw membership climb from 7,000 to over 20,000.\textsuperscript{286} While Williamson’s writings were largely ignored after 1945 because of his Fascist leanings, in the late 1930s he still maintained a significant readership.\textsuperscript{287} Williamson even secured his friend T. E. Lawrence’s support for the BUF’s activism in 1938.\textsuperscript{288} His ecological message helped revive some interest in the BUF. Williamson, due to his fame as a nature writer, reached a wider audience than typical Fascist writers did, raising interest in nature on a broad scale.\textsuperscript{289} While it is impossible to attribute all of the BUF’s 14,000 new members gained

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Tyldesley, \textit{Rolf Gardiner}, 112.
\item J. F. C. Fuller, \textit{Blackshirt}, August 1938, 12.
\item Mosley, \textit{My Life}, 338.
\item Thurlow, \textit{Fascism in Britain}, 94.
\item \textit{Ibid}.
\item For example, \textit{The Phoenix Generation} sold roughly 4,000 copies between 1939 and 1940, \textit{Tarka the Otter} had over 2,000 copies in circulation between 1930 and 1940, and his \textit{The Flax of Dream} book series
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
from 1937 to 1940 to the Party’s renewed emphasis on agricultural reforms and reconnecting with nature, as the Party's anti-war campaign was highly visible through several London rallies and thousands of posters hung across the city, the BUF’s agrarian stances had some positive impact on the Party's overall membership. Garden parties brought at least 1,000 new members into the BUF after 1936 and Williamson had over ten thousand readers during the late 1930s, a small fraction of which joined the BUF after hearing that he joined in 1937. A combination of factors, from its anti-war stance to its turn away from anti-Semitism, led to the BUF's resurgence after 1936, but the Party’s emphasis on agrarian and ecological issues was one of those important factors.

The British Union of Fascists underwent distinct periods of change from its founding in 1932 to its dissolution in 1940. The party’s environmental stances reflected these changes but also helped drive them to a large degree. When the BUF wanted to improve the nation and its environments, the party gained voters, but membership declined when the party’s agrarian and ecological views became racially charged and exclusionary. Oswald Mosley’s belief in the environment as a source for economic stimulation mirrored his overall faith in the Fascist corporatist system and helped attract thousands of voters to his cause. People were still dealing with the Great Depression and Mosley’s fascist party was a strong voice promising solutions to their troubles. William Joyce’s injection of “Blood and Soil”-esque ideology into the BUF’s policies was generally accepted among Far-Right intellectuals, including Mosley, Rolf Gardiner and Jorian Jenks. Yet Joyce’s extreme emphasis of unpopular racial and anti-Semitic beliefs

had over 1,000 copies in circulation as of 1940. Publication data on Williamson’s various books is available at https://www.henrywilliamson.co.uk/bibliography/a-lifes-work/.

Linehan, British Fascism, 239, 251-252.
nearly destroyed the BUF by alienating more moderate Fascists and attracting resistance from London’s Jewish community and their allies in government.

After Mosley simplified party structure, Jenks and Henry Williamson gained major influence over BUF ideology, making agricultural revival and respect for nature central party tenants. Both held prior esteem in different fields of British society that they brought to the BUF and used to their political benefit. Jenks had proven himself as an important voice in British agricultural thought during the early 1930’s through his many appeals to the public for agrarian reform, while Williamson was an award-winning nature writer and World War I veteran. Mosley embraced their ideas because he realized that they were politically advantageous and widely popular topics, especially among Far-Right activists and in rural communities. He was not an ecologist or a conservationist, but a politician who needed a base to remain viable. Yet Jenks, Williamson, and their associates were truly committed to the goals that they wrote about and incorporated into BUF ideology. Their advocacy for environmental issues influenced policy on the national level in ways that the BUF had failed to do in other areas of British life. After the party dissolved in 1940, and even after the war ended in 1945, Jenks, Williamson, Rolf Gardiner and Far-Right advocates for agriculture and nature continued to engage the same issues that they had during their time as British Fascists, finding more success than they had in the 1930’s.
CHAPTER III: A LEGACY BOTH GREEN & BLACK, 1940-1955

Despite the British Union of Fascists’ dissolution, British Fascist and Far-Right ideologies persisted long after 1940. Although British Fascist political power was diminished after this point, elements of Far-Right thought had permeated British culture and still influenced public policy and opinion during and after the war in rural areas and regarding agrarian issues. World War II left Britain’s Far-Right in a period of transition. Far-Right supporters no longer openly embraced Fascism due to war with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, even if they privately supported Fascism. Yet between 1940 and 1945, many former BUF members and other Far-Right thinkers joined the Rural Reconstruction Association and formed “social clubs,” like the Kinship in Husbandry, where they exchanged ideas and supported agrarian interests. The same advocates for agricultural reform, nature revival and “spiritual ecologism” within the Fascist movement during the 1930’s continued championing these causes during and after World War II. Although these activists abandoned Fascism as a means to achieve their agricultural and ecological goals, they remained committed to their original ideas when describing their visions for renewing the nation’s relationship to the land. They desired to bring about the same results as those intended by Jenks’ proposed BUF agricultural platform, only without a Fascist government enacting policy changes.

“Green” former Blackshirts dissociated their ecological ideas from Fascist politics after 1940 and exposed their ideas to many people outside of the Far-Right as a result.
The wartime experience, much as it had during and after World War I, inspired new activists to want to protect natural beauty, seek spiritual reconnection with the land, and reform agriculture. Like Jenks, Williamson and Gardiner, many of these new activists were themselves farmers or landowners, or were associated with nature in some personal way. Britain’s post-World War II generation of ecologists worked alongside interwar-generation activists to reshape Britain’s relationship to the countryside, even when those interwar activists were former Fascists. This happened most notably in the Rural Reconstruction Association and in the creation of the Soil Association in 1946, two powerful green activist groups that drove Britain’s grassroots conservation and organic movements in the 1940’s and 1950’s, and contributed to the rise of modern environmentalism in the 1960’s.

“Green” Fascists were among the most active and influential voices advocating for agrarian reform, ecology and conservation in Britain’s postwar decade. Jorian Jenks’, Rolf Gardiner’s, Henry Williamson’s collective experience and passion in arguing for nature and agriculture earned them intellectual capital with activists who championed causes such as rural economic reform, organic farming, government subsidies for farmers, animal husbandry, reforestation, and soil restoration. Many activists forgave Jenks’, Gardiner’s, and Williamson’s Fascist pasts because, in the minds of those fighting for better lives in rural areas, agrarian issues transcended political ideology. Yet many of the reforms that these grassroots activists supported after 1945 were the same as those the BUF campaigned for in the 1930’s. Ideas about land, farming, and nature still appealed to a broad audience after 1945. When “Green” Fascists separated their nature-oriented ideas
from Fascist politics, more people throughout Britain acted on these ideas to reshape Britain’s relationship to farming and nature.

The effects of World War II on nature & agriculture in Britain

World War II transformed the politics of British agriculture. Outside of a handful of acts in the 1920s and 1930s that attempted to ease depressed markets, agriculture in Interwar Britain was an afterthought for the Labour, Liberal and Conservative Parties. Yet agriculture became a central domestic issue for Parliament during and after the war, largely due to the impacts of war on the home front. The German *Blitzkrieg* drove 4 million Britons from cities and towns into the countryside. The German navy also waged war on any merchant ships attempting to bring supplies into the country, which sparked fears of food shortages.²⁹¹ This resulted in both the local and national governments seizing control over agriculture to make farming as productive as possible. The widespread destruction of cities, towns, and roads led millions of Britons to appreciate what historian Robert Mackay described as the refuge of “orderly farms, picturesque villages, the coast, the hills and uplands.”²⁹² To many in the World War II generation, these preserved landscapes represented the “True Britain” and were the last vestiges of the country left untouched after the bombings ceased.²⁹³ For decades, many conservationists and romantic writers had idealized the British countryside as a representation of the country’s soul. Yet World War II brought a new sense of

appreciation for nature and Britain’s real landscapes as people sought refuge from the war’s destruction. Britons during World War II could identify national strength in nature because the countryside, farms, hills and coasts were left intact and provided safe haven for millions.\textsuperscript{294} The necessities of war drove the government and the British people to reemphasize farming as a key element of national politics, strength and pride. After the war ended in 1945, no single group of people in Britain had benefitted more from wartime reforms than British farmers and rural landowners.

Parliament’s increased input in agricultural affairs actually began in April 1936, with the creation of a Food and Supply Sub-Committee of the U. K. Agricultural Committee. This sub-committee managed domestic food production and succeeded in increasing domestic crop cultivation by one-third, from 600,000 hectares of wheat in 1936, to 800,000 hectares of wheat by 1940; and by over two-thirds, from 800,000 hectares in 1940 to 1.5 million hectares in 1944.\textsuperscript{295} The government aided farmers by increasing subsidies and by funding the conversion of abandoned farms and open pasture into arable land.\textsuperscript{296} The outbreak of war accelerated the growth of domestic food production, but the upward trend began before the war with the government laying the foundation for agricultural improvements in the late 1930’s.

In August 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Cabinet capitalized on the national fear that war was on the horizon, to expand government control over agriculture. They did so via the County War Agricultural Executive Committee

\textsuperscript{294} Ibid., 410-411.
(CWAEC, known commonly as “War Ags”). The CWAECs operated during World War I as well, helping the government cultivate over 2 million acres of new farm land between 1914 and 1918, but the effects of the War Ags on agriculture following World War I proved temporary. The War Ags of World War II were more impactful in terms of short- and long-term agricultural improvements. The CWEACs were unique in that they were both a massive increase in government control over agriculture and a massive decentralization of government power in agricultural affairs, representing, as one British official claimed, “perhaps the most successful example of decentralization and the most democratic use of ‘control’ that this war has produced.” The CWAECs operated in every county in England and Wales, with loose oversight from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and from the Prime Minister’s War Cabinet.

Increased government intervention into British agriculture and the country’s overall wartime experience brought exceptional change to the countryside. Although Britain’s rural population had declined since the 1850’s, this trend reversed between 1940 and 1945, with nearly 4 million city- and town-dwellers, or roughly 10 percent of the country’s total population of 38 million, fleeing to rural areas, many receiving their first ever exposure to rural environments. The countryside represented safety from war, while the cities and towns were increasingly seen as targets for German bombs. Britain’s natural landscapes—pastures, fields, hills, coasts, waterways and woodlands—became

299 Parsons, The Political Economy, 86, 94.
both havens and physical representations of the nation, the last regions of Britain untouched by the war.

This shift in national perception of the countryside mirrored the government’s increased emphasis on national agricultural production. In 1940, newly-appointed Prime Minister Winston Churchill (served as Prime Minister 1940-1945, 1951-1955) pressured the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Home Secretary to “epitomise the results of their labours upon the land. The achievement in increasing our home-grown food and thus saving over 10 million tons of imports must be regarded as a very direct and vital contribution to our survival and ultimate victory.”

Churchill “set the tone” for how Britain was to approach agriculture during the war and it became one of his primary domestic concerns.

Churchill’s government granted the CWAECs more power in rural affairs than any previous government entity had possessed, and optimized their ability to enact reforms in the British countryside. The CWAECs across Britain had taken preliminary measures to prohibit excessive food purchases beginning on August 31st, 1939, and transitioned British food markets from privately traded to publicly controlled economic sectors, bringing the nation’s food supply and distribution under government control.

The CWAECs implemented part of these controls through food rations on imported goods such as meat, butter, salt, and tea, many of which lasted until 1954. After 1940, the CWAECs took great care in assessing every British farm and large plot of unused

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301 Winston Churchill to his War Cabinet, Letter 66, December 30, 1942.
land in England and Wales, and graded plots of land from “A” to “C.” CWAEC officials compiled these records into what was called a “modern Domesday book,” noting “the types of soil, the state of the buildings and cartroads, and so on.” Twelve out of every twenty farms earned an A grade, but the CWAECs offered every C-grade farm aid to boost land quality, food production, and infrastructure. Some farmers even lost their land to the government if their farms graded poorly enough, with nine CWAEC members and one member from the Women’s Land Army sent to revive these farms and make them useful to the wartime effort. The CWAECs monitored individual farmers in a police-like manner, and threatened to take away the livelihoods of those deemed “unproductive” by government standards. This near-authoritarian form of control proved successful in transforming British agriculture, as the CWAECs were a “helpful, local, and powerful force for positive change” in rural areas. Despite early grumblings from farmers who were at risk to lose their land to the CWAECs, most accepted government intervention “for the good of Britain.”

The CWAECs proved to be good for British farmers and British farming. Between 1939 and 1944, “tillage had increased from from 12.9 million acres to 19.8 million acres. Permanent grassland had decreased from 18.8 million acres to 11.7 million acres. The percentage of calories from home-produced food rose from about 33 percent in

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305 Ibid., 136.
306 Ibid., 137-138.
308 Short, Battle of the Fields, 407.
309 Ibid., 407
310 Ibid., 408
prewar years to 44 percent by 1944, and food imports were halved.”

Most significantly, “incomes rose from 160 pounds prewar to 540 pounds after 1945,” more than tripling in just 6 years. The number of agricultural workers also increased from 690,000 in 1939 to approximately 900,000 in 1945, over ten percent of which were women as part of the Women’s Land Army. These levels of labor and production had not been achieved since the 1890s and would not be matched again until the 1970s.

The government and rural Britons saw the CWAECs as so successful that the CWAECs stayed in control of the country’s agricultural sector for two years after the end of the war. Parliament solidified their most popular reforms in the Agriculture Act 1947. The Act, passed under Clement Attlee’s Labour government (1946-1951), established a more generous subsidy system for farmers and provisioned for a permanent Agricultural Wages Board to fix and maintain minimum wages for agricultural workers. The language of the Act described the governments’ goals as “promoting and maintaining…a stable and efficient agricultural industry capable of producing such part of the nation’s food and other agricultural produce as in the national interest it is desirable to produce in the United Kingdom.”

The Agricultural Act 1947 and the CWAECs left a lasting legacy on British farming and rural life. Although the number of agricultural workers has declined every year from 1945 to 2016, from over 900,000 to less than 200,000, farmers today have

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311 Ibid., 409.
312 Ibid., 410.
314 Ibid., 3.
better wages, produce over seven times the amount of food that farmers did in 1939, and own more land than the average worker did in 1939. Some of these trends are attributable to advances in harvesting technologies, better pesticides and fertilizers, and the monopolizing tendencies of larger agricultural companies, but smaller farmers have also seen increases in their wages and production over the last half-century.

The procedures that Churchill’s government instituted during the war were similar to the proposed rural renewal efforts advocated by Jorian Jenks during his time as BUF’s Agricultural Advisor. These included the idea of a “Volunteer Land Army” sent to reclaim and revive derelict or underproductive farms. Jenks’ core ideas for reviving British agriculture—including tighter government control, increasing farmer subsidies and farmer incomes, monitoring soil quality, and renewing derelict and under-productive farms with a government-sponsored “volunteer land army”—worked in practice, even if it was Churchill, and not Mosley, leading the government effort.

It is difficult to be certain if BUF ideas influenced government agricultural policy during World War II. It is possible that some agricultural advisors within the British government had read Jenks’ proposals and drew inspiration from him when developing their own strategies for agricultural improvements during the war, as historian Richard Moore-Colyer has suggested, but sources proving the link between Jenks and government policy-makers are difficult to find. Another possibility was that Jenks tapped into ideas for rural revival that were widely appealing to law-makers and agricultural advisors at the

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319 Ibid., 6.
320 Jenks, The Land and the People, 7.
time, and that the war provided the pretext necessary to put these ideas into practice. Jenks earned his degree at Oxford and served as an agricultural worker in the U. K. government for over five years, meaning that he shared ideas and experiences with many individuals who went on to work in the CWAECs. It is possible that Jenks himself may have worked in a CWAEC had he not been arrested as a Fascist in 1940. In this case then, Jenks succeeded in bringing British Fascism more in line with popular agricultural thinking of the late 1930s and early 1940s, rather than the CWAECs and the agricultural reforms of the 1940s representing some shift towards fascistic control over the countryside.

World War II brought about positive change for Britain’s farmers and the country’s agricultural industry. British farming in 1946 was better off than it was in 1936, or even in 1939, thanks to the “War Ags” and the extensive powers that Churchill’s government granted them over British farms. The wartime government accomplished in practice what many farmers, agricultural workers, rural lobbyists, and British Fascists had been arguing in favor of for decades: stronger, more profitable, and rejuvenated British agriculture. Most who had previously turned to the Far Right for solutions to rural problems recognized by the mid-1940s that mainstream political action had achieved many of their goals. The wartime reformation of British agriculture also transformed postwar British Fascism and shaped the direction of Britain’s postwar conservation and organic food movements.

322 Coupland, Farming, Fascism and Ecology, 147.
323 Ibid., 148.
324 Short, Battle of the Fields, 415.
World War II & Postwar British Fascism

World War II damaged Far-Right political organization in Great Britain, but failed to end it completely. After Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939, domestic support for the British Union of Fascists plummeted. Although Party membership had tripled between 1936 and 1938, BUF support fell from over 20,000 members in the spring of 1939 to just 750 by December of that year, with most leaving after Britain and France declared war on Germany after September 3rd. Those who remained loyal to the BUF included deputy leader Jorian Jenks, party officers J. F. C. Fuller and A. K. Chesterton, BUF economic advisor A. Raven Thompson, and party leader Oswald Mosley. Henry Williamson remained a member as well.

In the spring of 1940, Hitler ended the quiet winter of 1939-1940 and invaded Western Europe. The British government then arrested 742 BUF members under Defence Regulation 18B of the Defence (General) Regulations Act (1939), which granted the government the right to detain any persons suspected of being Nazi sympathizers indefinitely and without the right to habeas corpus. Arrested Fascists included all of the above-mentioned except for Williamson. Although the British government released some prisoners like Jorian Jenks as early as 1941, others, including Mosley, were not released until the war ended in 1945.

Although British Fascist parties appeared after 1945, none since 1945 have been as large or as influential in British culture as the British Union of Fascists was in the

325 Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, 199.
326 Macklin, Very Deeply Dyed in Black, 51.
1930s. The three parties that came closest to the BUF’s peak were Oswald Mosley’s Union Movement (1948-1978, 1983-1994), A. K. Chesterton’s National Front (NF) (1967-Present), and John Tyndall’s NF splinter group, the British National Party (BNP) (1982-Present). All three of these groups received national attention at different points throughout the twentieth century and all three represent the continued presence of Fascist politics on the fringes of British society. The NF and BNP both still exist as of 2017 and have recently re-entered the national conversation due to the recent “Brexit” campaign.

“Brexit” stemmed in part from the same anti-foreign, pro-nationalistic, and pro-insular economic tendencies that the NF and BNP have championed since their inceptions in 1967 and 1982, respectively. Yet neither group would exist in their current forms without Oswald Mosley’s influence, the BUF, and its successor, the Union Movement. Variations of Mosley’s 1932 slogan, “A Greater Britain,” persist today as “Britain First,” or the even more exclusive “England First.” These later movements also moved away from championing agrarian interests and pacifism. The BNP still claims that “revitalizing British farming” and “self-sufficiency” through increased food production are key economic goals, but their leaders have rarely commented on the state of British farming or on strategies to achieve these goals. BNP members have denounced global climate change as a “socialist hoax” and claimed that they are Britain’s “true environmental

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party” because the modern environmental movement is thinly-veiled socialism, “Leftist at it’s core.”

Modern British Fascism focuses on racial superiority and nationalism rather than themes of rural renewal and spiritual rejuvenation. This change stems from the years after 1945 and has much to do with Mosley himself and his personal political shift. This change also stemmed from shifts in the platforms of Britain’s two major parties, Labour and Tory, during the 1940s. Both parties had adopted agriculture as a central platform by 1945. The Labour government of the late 1940s also placed a strong emphasis on conservation and landscape preservation. Agricultural reform and anti-war activism were the BUF’s two most popular platforms, but with no impending war to protest and agriculture a mainstream political topic by 1945, Mosley and his followers had to modify their message to retain some sense of relevancy. Immigration and the British Empire’s accelerated transformation into the Commonwealth of Nations were growing concerns for Far-Right nationalists and working-class laborers after World War II, and so Mosley made these issues central to his new political party.

After being released from prison in 1945, Mosley returned to Far-Right political organization and rallied most former BUF officers under a new group called the Union Movement (1948-1978; 1983-1994 as the “Action Society”). Former BUF members also created British Fascist groups while Mosley was in prison from 1940 to 1945, the four primary ones being “Jeffrey Hamm's British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, Anthony Gannon's Imperial Defence League, Victor Burgess's Union of British Freedom,

334Macklin, Very Deeply Dyed in Black, 49.
and Horace Gowing and Tommy Moran's Sons of St George." Once Mosley was released, these groups joined together, combining to create a contingent of over 3,000 supporters. Hamm, Gannon, and Mosley all carried on the delusion that British Fascism could be a major factor in British politics, ignoring the reality that their movement was a dead-end, hated by a significant majority of the population and irrelevant outside of the few thousands that still believed in the dream of a Fascist government. Although at first he was reluctant to return to far-right politics, by 1948 Mosley agreed to lead this new group and formed the UM.

Thomas Linehan has argued that the Union Movement represented Mosley’s attempts at a political “rebirth,” a means to distance himself from Far-Right ideology and embrace “socialist internationalism.” Yet Graham Macklin argued that Mosley created the Union Movement out of “a combination of overweening egoism and the monumental self-delusion that he, and he alone, was capable of defeating Stalin’s Asiatic hordes.” The Union Movement, in Macklin’s view, was less a rejection of Fascism than it was a hallmark of the Far-Right’s transition into a “New Fascism” centered on racial and economic nationalism.

Mosley created the Union Movement, in part, as a response to the Commonwealth Conference of 1947 and the subsequent British Nationality Act 1948. At the Commonwealth Conference, member nations of the British Empire decided that each independent state within the Commonwealth could legislate on its own citizenship and

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336 Linehan, *British Fascism*.
create a legal nationality separate from the broad statuses of “Commonwealth citizen” or “British subject.” A year after the conference, the Labour government passed the *British Nationality Act 1948* and created the status of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies” as the official nationality of the U. K. Australia, New Zealand and Southern Rhodesia also passed similar legislation in 1948 in response to the conference. These acts increased immigration from Commonwealth countries into the United Kingdom, particularly from India, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa. Commonwealth citizens from these countries hoped to gain U. K. citizenship and better economic prospects in London and other major cities. Foreign immigration to the U. K. increased from 3,000 per year in 1947 to over 10,000 per year by 1950, eventually rising to over 33,000 per year by 1959. Immigration became a significant issue for London’s working class laborers in the decade after 1948. The UM’s racially exclusive policies and British Fascism’s history of emphasizing economic insularism and British racial superiority meant that those most affected by the U. K.’s immigration influx were open to supporting Mosley’s party. Restricting immigration became the primary domestic issue for the UM throughout the 1950’s and was the only policy proposal that gave the UM political and social relevance in British society.

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Mosley, J. F. C. Fuller, and Jeffrey Hamm recruited as many former BUF members to the Union Movement as possible, with mixed success. Most of the 750 arrested BUF members joined the Union Movement. Many were so committed to Fascist ideals and the cult of “Mosleyism” that they could not bring themselves to support any other leader.\textsuperscript{347} The UM’s membership grew to over 5,000 by 1950, but fluctuated between a few hundred and several thousand between 1950 and 1970. They never achieved the same growth as the BUF due to strong opposition from London’s urban Jewish community and “bad press” from Jewish, Socialist, and minority protests against the UM.\textsuperscript{348} While Henry Williamson and A. K. Chesterton joined the UM in 1948, Jorian Jenks refused due to unspecified “philosophical differences” between himself and Mosley, likely pertaining to their disagreements over international trade policies.\textsuperscript{349} Despite this, Jenks still contributed to the UM’s Agricultural Policy Council from 1948 to 1949 and helped write the UM’s agricultural manifesto, \textit{None Need Starve} (1948), which focused on using Fascist economic policies to increase food production and quality.\textsuperscript{350} Williamson pushed for romantic naturism to be a key philosophical element in UM ideology, writing in Diana Mosley’s UM newsletter \textit{The European} of the spiritual “covenant between man and nature.”\textsuperscript{351} Yet Williamson played a much smaller role in the UM than he did in the BUF. Williamson and Mosley had their own falling out in 1956, as

\textsuperscript{347} Macklin, \textit{Very Deeply Dyed in Black}, 56.
\textsuperscript{349} Macklin, \textit{Very Deeply Dyed in Black}, 157.
\textsuperscript{351} Henry Williamson, \textit{The European}, August 1953.
Williamson felt that the UM and Mosley had moved away from the BUF’s core goals of national and spiritual renewal.\textsuperscript{352}

The UM endorsed a form of “European Nationalism” through expanded economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{353} Mosley envisioned British history as a linear progression, and believed that the next step in Britain’s political development was to unify Europe under British leadership.\textsuperscript{354} The UM adopted the slogan “Progress—Solidarity—Unity” and aimed at creating “Europe-a-Nation,” applying Fascist ideals about national strength and economic corporatism to the entire continent.\textsuperscript{355} Mosley proposed that a strong authoritarian executive lead, one that the public could endorse or reject through annual referendums.\textsuperscript{356} The UM’s platform aimed to create a European Fascist super state with Britain as the lead nation, an unrealistic goal fueled by Mosley’s own delusions of grandeur and support from his devoted followers.

Western Europe shifted towards international integration after World War II, and Mosley adopted this trend into the UM’s platform. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was an international economic body established under the treaty of Paris in 1951 between France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, West Germany, and Italy. The ECSC regulated the industrial production of its six core nations and helped promote peace on the continent through economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{357} In 1956, France and Britain also explored the idea of integration during the Suez Crisis, when French Prime

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Macklin} Macklin, \textit{Very Deeply Dyed in Black}, 158.
\bibitem{Mosley} Oswald Mosley, \textit{The Alternative} (London: Blackhouse, 1947), 34.
\bibitem{Ibid} \textit{Ibid.}, 35.
\bibitem{Ibid} \textit{Ibid.}, 36-37.
\bibitem{Dorril} Dorril, \textit{Oswald Mosley and British Fascism}, 566.
\bibitem{CVCE} “The European Communities,” CVCE, retrieved May 15, 2017. \url{http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_european_communities-en-3940ef1d-7c10-4d0f-97fc-0cf1e86a32d4.html}.
\end{thebibliography}
Minister Guy Mollet proposed a Franco-British Union, with common citizenship and Queen Elizabeth II as the shared head-of-state.\(^{358}\) British Prime Minister Anthony Eden wanted France to join the Commonwealth of Nations and become a secondary state to the UK, a proposal that Mollet rejected.\(^{359}\) Yet these flirtations led Britain, France, and their European allies to expand the original reach of the ECSC in 1957 and create the European Economic Community (EEC), forerunner to the European Union.\(^{360}\)

While the UM was unsuccessful, the Party did garner some international attention during the 1950’s and 1960’s due to Mosley’s “Europe-a-Nation” campaign. For instance, in 1962, Mosley helped create a “National Party of Europe” alongside Germany's Reichspartei, France’s Mouvement d’Action Civique, Belgium’s Jeune Europe, and the Italian Social Movement.\(^{361}\) While few historians credit the UM for increasing British support for the idea of a European Union, Linehan and others have acknowledged that Mosley and his followers played a minor role in popularizing European international cooperation during the 1950’s and 1960’s.\(^{362}\)

The Union Movement maintained “Mosleyism” as a minor presence in British politics through the 1970’s. He stood for parliamentary elections during every election cycle from 1959 until his retirement in 1973, and played a small early role in stirring domestic support for the European Economic Community.\(^{363}\) Yet Mosley’s emphasis on economic internationalism drove away those British Fascists who desired economic

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\(^{359}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{362}\) Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 173.
insularism and high import tariffs as means to improve the rural economy. During the 1940’s and 1950’s, the Conservative and Labour government’s significant agricultural reforms changed the country’s political culture and made agriculture and ecology important topics across the political spectrum.\(^{364}\) Former Fascists with pro-environmental beliefs no longer needed Fascism to achieve their desired agrarian and ecological goals. British Fascist ideology de-emphasized “soil” and re-emphasized “blood” in domestic policy proposals.\(^{365}\) The reformation of the Far-Right and the restructuring of Britain’s agricultural sector in the post-war decade separated “Green” former Fascists from Fascist politics for the remainder of the twentieth century.

The Soil Association, the rise of environmental thought, & the Far Right, 1946-1955

In addition to improvements in agriculture and rural life, there were several key developments regarding nature in British society during the 1940s. Forestry, animal husbandry, and “forest parks” grew in popularity from 1941 through the end of the decade; the popularity of nature preserves, hiking paths, and nature parks also increased after 1945.\(^{366}\) Organic farming and “better food” campaigns arose during the early 1940s, coinciding with the increase in domestic food production and the growing amount of “cheap food” consumption throughout the country during and after the war.\(^{367}\) Increased popular support for conservation and environmentally conscious issues during the 1940s contributed to the creation of ten national parks in the 1950s, including four in 1951, two


\(^{365}\) Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 188.

\(^{366}\) Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*, 84-85.

in 1952, and four more between 1956 and 1957. Since then, the government has created only three more national parks.\textsuperscript{368} Amongst those calling for conservation and organic farming were several former BUF members and Far-Right advocates, including Jorian Jenks, Rolf Gardiner, and Lord Lymington. These men became leaders in Britain’s organic and ecological movements, most notably through involvement in the Rural Reconstruction Association and through creating the Soil Association in 1946.

Rolf Gardiner maintained the connection between nature groups and the Far Right after the BUF and the English Array dissolved in 1940. He avoided arrest, despite having a reputation as the U. K.’s “cultural ambassador” to Nazi Germany, and holding multiple social connections to British Fascist groups.\textsuperscript{369} Although he believed that Fascism was best for Britain, Gardiner was more interested in nature, animal husbandry, reforestation, and organicism, and he pursued those interests after 1940.\textsuperscript{370} It was dangerous to be considered a Fascist during World War II, so Gardiner distanced himself from the English Array to avoid government suspicion.\textsuperscript{371} Yet he maintained his ties to Far-Right associates who shared his passion for nature, including Lord Lymington and H. J. Massingham. Together, these men formed a new group that resembled the English Array but emphasized nature, forestry and husbandry, rather than broader Far-Right interests like ethnic purity and authoritarian government.\textsuperscript{372} Gardiner’s Kinship in Husbandry provided a place for Far-Right intellectuals to share ideas about nature, society and

\textsuperscript{368} “History of the National Parks,” UK National Parks, accessed April 15, 2017. \url{http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/press/history.htm}.
\textsuperscript{372} \textit{Ibid.}, 88.
politics during the war, free from government persecution. The group was never politically active, thus sparing its members from government suspicion. It served as a social group for men and women who appreciated Britain’s natural beauty and wanted a free space to discuss politics in the anti-Fascist climate of World War II.\textsuperscript{373} Gardiner and Lord Lymington also joined the Rural Reconstruction Association during this time, providing financial support for the group and continuing to work towards the goal of “reviving agriculture” and “decentralising the national population.”\textsuperscript{374}

Henry Williamson fell into obscurity after World War II, as his unapologetic Fascism reduced his overall readership and turned him into a social pariah. He was only detained for one weekend in 1940 under Defence Regulation 18B, yet this brief time in prison as a “Fascist traitor” impacted his public image. He abandoned farming in 1946 and divorced his wife in 1947. He maintained his friendship with Oswald Mosley through 1948, but even Mosley had a falling out with Williamson over political differences. Their soured relationship and the minimal visibility of the Union Movement led Williamson to abandon political life altogether. With few allies in the public sphere or in Fascist circles, Williamson retreated to his nature-writing.\textsuperscript{375}

Williamson proved an even more prolific nature-writer after World War II than he was in the interwar years, publishing over 21 novels between 1945 and 1973.\textsuperscript{376} Nature was his escape from his troubled life. After World War II, Williamson was more
convinced than ever that Britain’s environments were where the country’s “true soul resided” and that its landscapes, rivers, animals, and trees were worth protecting. He developed a cult following during the 1950s among conservationists, agriculturalists, and ecologists, inspiring thinkers and writers like Ted Hughes, Rachel Carson, Roger Deakin, Kenneth Allsop, and Denys Watkins-Pitchford. The latter called *Tarka the Otter* (1928) “the greatest animal story ever written,” and Carson claimed that his writing “greatly influenced” her own work. Although Williamson never gained the same recognition as later nature-writers, conservationists, or activists, his writing and passion inspired many to campaign for Britain’s natural environments.

Of all of the BUF’s former members, none had a greater impact on British ecology than Jorian Jenks. He was released from prison in the autumn of 1941 and became a tenant farmer in Seaford, East Sussex, where he also continued to write about the necessity for “spiritual ecologism” and a stronger connection between humanity and the soil. Although his involvement in the BUF had resulted in his arrest as a traitor, Jenks maintained his desire for a stronger, action-oriented government, especially in rural areas. He joined Rolf Gardiner’s Kinship in Husbandry in 1941 and H. J. Massingham’s Council for the Church and Countryside in 1942, where he continued to discuss Far-Right ideas regarding nature, the soil, and society with like-minded individuals. Jenks and Gardiner became closer friends during the early 1940s and together turned the Kinship in Husbandry into an intellectual hive for Far-Right thinkers and for conservationists. Jenks

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377 Henry Williamson, *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), 34.
and others drew inspiration from leading agriculturalists and thinkers such as Albert Howard, George Stapledon, and Rudolf Steiner, and formed connections with the Rural Reconstruction Association and its leadership.  

Jenks directed the RRA’s ideology towards British Fascism during the 1940s and early 1950s. He edited the RRA journal, *The Rural Economy*, from 1944 to 1956 and inserted his own political thinking into it. He also crafted the RRA’s manifesto, *Feeding the Fifty Million* (1955), a work concerned with “national self-sufficiency and food security,” themes which had figured largely in his fascist writings of the 1930s. The RRA’s reports concerning how to transform Britain’s agricultural economy into an autarky during the 1940s and 1950s “greatly interested” G. P. Wibberly, Research Officer of the Agricultural Land Service of the Ministry of Agriculture, and Jenks met with him to discuss how to implement the RRA’s ideas. By 1950, Jenks and his colleague Robert Saunders “had infiltrated very thoroughly” the RRA Research Committee. Through the RRA they were able to “make contacts with men of considerable importance and influence” within the British government, “access to whom would have been closed had the true nature of their politics been disclosed, and, therefore, allowing them to inject a central tenet of fascist ideology into an unsuspecting mainstream.” Through the RRA, Jenks influenced government agricultural policy and brought some far-right agricultural policies into mainstream politics. For instance, in 1951 Wibberly used Jenks’ findings in *Feeding the Fifty Million* that foretold a massive food shortage crisis to try

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385 Ibid., 66-67.
and bring British agriculture closer to autarky, which had been the BUF’s goal since the mid-1930s.386

In addition to issues of nature and agriculture, Jenks was interested in organicism.387 He believed that the country was in the middle of a slow, decades-long decline and that poor food quality and the associated health risks were at the center of the decline.388 His ideal method of organic agriculture sought “harmony with nature through the wise husbandry of the soil’s fertility, its plants and animals.”389 Jenks’ support for organic farming was reflected in the BUF’s official agricultural policies from 1937 to 1940, as those policies aimed to turn Britain’s stale “fill-belly” into wholesome, nutritious food.390 Malnutrition had been an issue since the height of the Industrial Revolution in the 1860s, yet increased production of cereals and grains in the late 1930s and early 1940s due to the war, coupled with increased pesticide and artificial fertilizer usage, had resulted in an abundance of less healthy food throughout Britain.391 Although few at the time recognized the health detriments associated with high pesticide usage and the damaging effects of artificial fertilizers on soil, Jenks had close associates who had been studying these problems since 1938. The study that had the most impact on Jenks, and on British ecology, was Lady Eve Balfour’s The Living Soil (1943).392

Balfour, the niece of former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and cousin to Rolf Gardiner by marriage, was a farmer and agricultural scientist. In 1928, she studied at

386 Ibid., 67.
387 Jenks, The Land and the People, 5.
388 Jenks, Spring Comes Again, 23.
389 Coupland, “Jorian Jenks.”
390 Jenks, The Land and the People, 1.
392 Coupland, Farming, Fascism and Ecology, 146.
Oxford University, at the same time as Jorian Jenks. In 1939, she launched the Haughley Experiment, the first-ever side-by-side comparison between organic and chemical-based farming techniques and the effects of each style on crop and soil quality. The experiment’s results, as detailed in The Living Soil, proved “revolutionary” in that they illustrated the link between “correct soil management”—limited chemical use, relying on natural fertilizers and organic farming methods—and public health due to higher quality food. Balfour also made clear the importance of nature and the soil in all life, arguing that “society, like a house, does not start at ground level, but begins quite literally beneath the surface of our planet, within the soil itself. . . . If we destroy our soil—and it is not indestructible—mankind will vanish from the earth as surely as has the dinosaurs [sic].”

Balfour’s work proved influential among soil conservationists, agricultural experts, and among common readers. The Living Soil sold over 2 million copies between 1943 and 1947, and has multiple editions and updates. The book is now considered the “foundational text” for the modern organic movement, according to multiple environmental experts. The Living Soil and the Haughley experiment also served as inspiration for members of the Rural Reconstruction Association and the Kinship in Husbandry to join Balfour in supporting organic agriculture.

394 Balfour, The Living Soil, 10.
395 Ibid., 23.
396 Ibid., 1.
The leading green thinkers of the Far-Right backed Balfour. Her impassioned writing spoke to Jenks, who had long preached on the need to restore the bond between humanity and the soil. Balfour’s belief that “the earthly habitat of man’s spirit is his body…[which] springs from the soil itself,” nearly matched Jenks’ belief in the spiritual ecologism that bonded humanity and soil. 399 Lord Lymington used his substantial finances to fund Balfour’s research, while Rolf Gardiner, Jorian Jenks, and H. J. Massingham supported her when she created the Soil Association in 1946. 400 Balfour became the Association’s first president, with Lymington as the group’s financier and Gardiner in an advisory role. Jenks edited their journal, *Mother Earth*, becoming the Soil Association’s ideological leader. 401

Jenks reached far more readers through the Soil Association than he ever did as the BUF’s agricultural advisor. His writings in *Mother Earth*, as well as his popular books *Spring Comes Again* (1946) and *From the Ground Up* (1950), were quite different from his writings in the 1930s as the BUF’s agricultural advisor, which addressed specific agrarian issues with policy proposals. In these works, Jenks focused on the spiritual connection between humanity and nature. In *Spring Comes Again*, he stated, “when we feel most in need of guidance, let us remember the Divine manifestation of Nature. For Nature is one of the very few real and permanent things in this world of ours.” 402 In a later passage, Jenks claimed that “neither to man nor his works is granted the immortality of godhead; he is born not to achieve finality, but to struggle increasingly

399 Balfour, *The Living Soil*, 3.
towards it…As the Cross is his sure sign of redemption and final reward, so the eternal miracle of the seasons is his sure sign of life and hope ever renewed.”

Without the constraints of having to address policy as the representative of a political party, Jenks was free to write about all of nature and the importance of the natural world in shaping the human experience. He broadened his message into one that many found appealing on some basic level. *Mother Earth* had over 3 million monthly readers at its height in 1953 while his books sold well and have been reprinted multiple times in the decades since publication.

Jenks blended some Far-Right ideas into his discussions about the spiritual connection between humanity and nature. Later in *Spring Comes Again*, Jenks argued that “few can find lasting satisfaction in cynicism and materialism,” two key problems he felt plagued society, “so the people are restless…from the economic dog-fight of the great cities. They flee…to the country or the coast…That is the motif of modern life—escape, escape, escape.”

Jenks implied throughout his works that the return to nature and “restructuring the political order” into one that promoted action, cooperation and efficiency would provide better lives for all. In *From the Ground Up*, Jenks claimed that economic liberalism had turned the market from “an ordered association of men for a common purpose” into “an arena in which men rose or fell according to their own capacity for self-preservation.” Likewise, the rise of the “machine-power” led to money flowing into “the machine itself” and away from “ecological and organic

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403 Ibid., 1-2.
405 Jenks, *Spring Comes Again*, 5.
406 Ibid., 17.
interests.” He believed that national regeneration must be cultivated through “localized human associations rooted in their native soil and historic traditions, and actuated by a common sense of spiritual purpose.” Throughout the 1930s, Jenks claimed that fascism was “about teamwork” at the local and national levels, and his idea of using a nationalistic, anti-capitalist, anti-liberal democratic framework was still present in his writings after World War II, albeit not as explicit as before.

It is important to note that these ideas about nature and farming were not necessarily “fascist” in the sense that they were exclusive to fascism, but they were central to the British Fascist platform and were still important to former British Fascists. Their ideas about nature transcended ideology because nature was a universally relatable space. Supporters of the Left and Right found common ground through admiration of the environment. Each side has used the environment to their own political ends throughout the twentieth century, the BUF being just one example. While Jenks’ ecological ideas may still be called “Fascist” or “Far-Right” because they were important to his personal philosophy, the BUF, and his Far-Right colleagues, by the early 1950s his ideas influenced millions of people who fell well outside of the Far-Right spectrum. These people accepted his philosophies about nature and proved that these ideas were not exclusive to Fascists.

Due to Jenks’ popular influence, the Soil Association and Britain’s early organic movement were shaped in part by the Far-Right. Millions of Britons were exposed to Fascist ideas about nature when they read *Mother Earth* during the late 1940s and early

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408 Ibid., 43.
409 Ibid., 159.
1950s, and many accepted these ideas because they found them appealing and because few immediately recognized them as ideas belonging to the Far-Right. 410 Readers approached Jenks and the Soil Association looking for discussions relating to nature, the land, and organicism. For many, it did not matter that many of Jenks’ and Gardiner’s ideas about nature and organic farming had their origins in Far-Right thinking because their ideas were positive steps towards improving humanity’s relationship with the environment.

The general public did not suspect that leading promoters of organic farming, agriculture and conservation were former Fascists. While some had heard of Jorian Jenks and Rolf Gardiner before 1945 and knew that these men supported Fascism, and others were familiar with the BUF’s agricultural policies through pamphlets from the 1930s like The Land and the People (1938), the millions of Britons who engaged agricultural and ecological interests in the 1940s and 1950s dwarfed the tens of thousands among them who knew the specifics of British Fascist politics and policy-makers. Jenks’ new audiences in the Soil Association and the RRA recognized agricultural self-sufficiency and better food quality as good ideas, not as Fascist policies. 411

After 1945, Britain was more receptive to agricultural revival, organicism and conservation. This was due to World War II’s destruction of cities, the masses seeking refuge in the countryside and on the coasts, and government progress in implementing agricultural reforms. Those interested in learning more about nature listened to the ideas

411 For instance, the Soil Association still considers the “research, development, and promotion of sustainable relationships between the soil, plants, animals, people and the biosphere” to be its “raison d’être,” all ideas which stemmed from the British Fascists in the groups’ original ranks and their “back to the land” ethic. For more, see Moore-Colyer, “Towards Mother-Earth,” 371; also [http://www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org).
of men and women who had been promoting pro-environmental ideas since the late 1920s. It did not matter that many of these environmental leaders were former Fascists, as it was their core message of returning to the soil and a simpler way of life that resonated with Britons on a large scale, not the politics behind the message. Fascism was irrelevant, but “Green” Fascists were relevant to conservationists, agricultural reformers, and organicists in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus, they were able to have a larger impact on agricultural and conservationist thought during these decades than they were at any time before World War II.
CONCLUSION

When examining the connection between nature and British Fascism, the most important question is simply, “Why does it matter?” To understand why, one must revisit the two questions that originally inspired this project: First, why did fascist intellectuals support environmentally conscious ideas, and how did they relate these positions to their political ideologies? Second, why were many environmentally conscious thinkers during this period attracted to fascism? Hopefully, the previous chapters have answered these questions sufficiently, but if not, the following summary may suffice.

Fascist intellectuals like Jorian Jenks, Rolf Gardiner, Henry Williamson, and their many colleagues supported ecological and agrarian causes because these felt essential to their politics and their overall world-view. British Fascism drew much of its ideological foundation from the Far-Right agrarian politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as from the nature writings of men such as Richard Jeffries. Fascism was an ideology of action and emotion, and no single sector of British society needed more political action or felt more forgotten by the status-quo than British farmers in the 1920s and 1930s. The countryside was fertile ground for British Fascists to exploit and gain supporters, partly because the connection between Far-Right ideology and rural life had existed for decades.

Yet the connection between British Fascists and nature ran deeper than politics. From agrarian economic interests to the land itself, many Fascists held the belief that the
British landscape and British farms were central to the country’s identity and that this identity was slipping away in favor of an unhealthy, polluted, urban way of life. This change in national identity began as far back as the 1850s and had reached a major turning point by the early 1920s. More Britons lived in urban areas than ever before and British agriculture was more depressed than at any point in the country’s recent history. The World War I experience, marked by massive natural devastation, unprecedented loss of life, disease within the trenches, all at the hands of new technologies and “liberal-democratic” leaders, compounded the feeling among British Fascists that their country needed a new direction that reconnected humanity with nature and the country’s forgotten spirit.⁴¹²

Groups across Europe shared similar sentiments and experiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While some German Völkisch groups were among the most infamous in Europe for their contributions to Nazi ideology, folk and naturist revival groups that promoted a return to the soil and simpler times arose throughout Western Europe and the United States. British rural revivalism was not a unique example of this type of thought, but part of a trend seen all throughout the industrialized world.

Fascist groups provided forums for agriculturalists and farmers who felt left behind or had grown frustrated over the lack of meaningful progress from Parliament in enacting agrarian reforms. After World War II, the agriculturalists and “green” activists within the British Fascist movement no longer needed Fascism to find an audience for

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⁴¹² Rolf Gardiner, *World Without End: British Politics and the Younger Generation* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932), 31. Gardiner describes the angst that he and many others felt over the future of the country and explored some of the reasons for the country’s anxieties, which included frustration over the post-World War I experiences that he and his veteran friends shared. Jenks describes similar anxieties for similar reasons in *Spring Comes Again.*
their ideas. Nature and agriculture became the primary means through which Jorian Jenks, Rolf Gardiner, Henry Williamson and others engaged with society and with British politics after World War II. Although these individuals never abandoned their ideology, they left Fascist politics and engaged the growing organic and conservation movements, making a lasting impact on the country’s environmental history. For instance, while the Soil Association shifted to the political Left in 1963 after Jenks’ death, the group that today screens eighty percent of Britain’s organic food for quality still claims many of Jenks’ original goals from *The Land and the People*—better food quality, national food security, self-sustainability, and a stronger agricultural sector—as its own goals.  

British Fascism failed as a political movement in the 1930s, but British Fascists made essential contributions to developing Britain’s modern organic and environmental movements.

Britain has experienced a resurgence of Far-Right politics in recent years, “Brexit” proving to be the latest development in the country’s turn towards populism and nationalism. One of the most visible groups behind this political sea-change is the British National Party. While the BNP’s leaders use code-words like “economic nationalism” to describe their platform, make no mistake: the BNP is a Neo-Fascist party and the direct successor of the BUF, the Union Movement, and the National Front. Many of the BNP’s policies are almost identical to the BUF’s racial, economic, and political platforms. Similar Far-Right populist groups have arisen throughout Europe in countries

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414 Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 223.
like France and the Netherlands, and even in the United States with the “Alt-Right.”

Future historians will have much to say about the Far-Right resurgence of the early twenty-first century, but looking to Far-Right groups of the past and examining how they engaged with the problems of their time can help the historians of today better grasp how the Far Right operates and why it appeals to people. The connection between Fascism and nature matters because it informs the understanding of both Fascism and how people have engaged with nature in the past. Fascism appealed to agriculturalists and farmers because it promised action and hope, while nature and agrarian interests proved to be central aspects of British Fascist and Far-Right ideologies. Because of this connection, British Fascists were key players in shaping the country’s ecological and agricultural reform movements.

Despite vast differences in political outlook when comparing Jorian Jenks and his colleagues to those currently championing the modern organic and environmental movements, these two groups share common ground, and that ground is the admiration of nature. The legacy of British Fascist involvement in ecological affairs continues through the Soil Association and the writings that they left behind. This complicates common modern understanding of both camps, while shedding light on the strange notion that, yes, even the Fascists were aware of ecological problems and took action to address them. If they were capable of understanding nature’s importance to humanity, why aren’t we?

\footnote{Jeffrey A. Tucker, “Five Differences Between the Alt-Right and Libertarianism,” \textit{Foundation for Economic Education}, August 26, 2016, accessed April 27, 2017. \url{http://www.fee.org/articles/five-differences-between-the-alt-right-and-libertarians/}.}
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VITA

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