

THE
BATTLE OF CABLE STREET
They shall not pass

AN ACCOUNT OF WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES
AGAINST FASCISM

Including PHIL PIRATIN, THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR and
the RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE



PUBLISHED BY SERTUC

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

THE BATTLE OF CABLE STREET	1
THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET	15
THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE	20
THE GREAT DEPRESSION	29
OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF	33
PHIL PIRATIN	39
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR	44
THE SECOND WORLD WAR	50
FAR RIGHT POLITICS	57
ANTI-SEMITISM	64

FOREWORD

Welcome to the fourth booklet from SERTUC looking at the important histories of our Region.

The Cable Street battle has gone down in history as a fine example of working class solidarity, working class organisation, and working class success.

The leaders of the response to Mosley's Fascists' intent to march through their East End community, and to the state's intent to facilitate it, drew together the many people and cultures of their neighbours, as well as winning the support of the politically aware to ensure that the Fascists did not succeed.

Of course, this did not happen in a vacuum and the book includes context pieces that chart the background to this East End area, the rise of Fascism across Europe, as well as the world economic situation and the Spanish Civil War and Second World War wars that followed. And finally we look at the state of far right politics today, knowing that Fascism lurks ready to utilise the continued poverty and hardship facing many people by offering easy and fake scapegoats.

As ever there are many books published that offer a detailed and referenced history of Cable Street. We do not intend to compete with them, rather to offer an accessible entry to the wider issues of the moment.

FOREWORD

And I once more extend my sincere thanks to our author, Peta Steel, whose research and text gives us this book. It is in the great tradition of the trade union movement that our strength lies not in the senior offices, but in the voluntary contributions of our members! And Peta lies well in that tradition.

So, to finish, I believe the key lesson of this story is that all successes in our movement rely not only on understanding the political context, but also on acting upon it. The men and women of Cable Street didn't only see the danger of Fascism for their community and their country - they acted on it and we are in their debt.

Megan Dobney
SERTUC Regional Secretary
November 2017

Our previous publications celebrating the campaigning and fight of workers in our Region are *The Spithead and Nore Mutinies of 1797*, *The Levellers Movement*, and *The Burston School Strike*. They are available free to download at <https://sertucresources.wordpress.com/sertuc-publications-general/>

THE
BATTLE OF CABLE STREET
They Shall Not pass

SUNDAY 4 October 1936 opened on a sunny morning. The battle for Cable Street, which would see the East Enders rise to stop Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts from marching through an area highly populated by Jews, would be over by night time. That day would see the people of the East End, aided by trade unionists, members of the Communist and Labour parties and anti-Fascists, stand up against intimidation; by stopping Mosley they would force the establishment, which had been lenient with its dealings with one of its own, to reconsider its attitude towards him. More importantly it would send out a message that people would come together whatever their background to fight against something they perceived as evil and as a threat. It would become part of the history of the East End and of the battle against Fascism.

Tempers and tensions simmered throughout the long hot summer of 1936 as British Fascists took to the streets peddling their hatred. In Paris, police had shot and killed Communists, anti-Fascists and 'Rightists' in riots, as left and right battled it out physically in the streets and in the chambers of government. In Germany, the Nazis strengthened their hold on the country as the opposition was thrown into concentration camps, beaten up and murdered. German Jews desperately tried to find ways of leaving their homeland. In Spain the Civil War, where republicans

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

supported by Stalin took on the right wing armed forces of Franco supported by Hitler and Mussolini, acted as a catalyst as men and women of the left from all over Europe flocked to fight for the elected Spanish government. Men and women of sensibility looked on at the rise of Fascism and cringed.

Blackshirt leader Oswald Mosley had already held a series of demonstrations, marching with impunity through other parts of the East End and London. Similar demonstrations by Fascists had taken place outside London in areas where depression had hit hardest; one of their first in Stockton-on-Tees on 10 September 1933 had been stopped by anti-Fascist demonstrators, led by Communists who drove out members of the British Union of Fascists bussed into the area.

Mosley's demonstration aimed to be deliberately provocative as it was to go through Stepney, the most heavily populated Jewish area in the East End. Initially news of plans to hold the march had been greeted with disdain by both the Jewish establishment and by the general labour movement, who had called upon people to ignore Mosley. But local activists were determined to stop the march; they argued that not to respond would give the impression that Mosley and his Blackshirts had won. The march through Stepney was to be stopped at any cost, and the place where the march would eventually be stopped would be Cable Street.

Cable Street, and Stepney itself, was an overcrowded area; Cable Street was narrow, packed with houses described as little more than slums. Some 225,238 people were recorded as living in Stepney in 1931, though by 1936, with the beginning of slum clearances and the building of new houses and flats in other areas,

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

the population in other parts of the East End was beginning to fall. The number of children per family in Stepney was 3.92, the highest in London; those figures were also indicative of the poverty in the area.

News of the plan announced on 26 September by Mosley to hold a large march through the East End was met with incredulity and horror. Although the Jewish establishment and the Labour Party had at first called upon people not to pay any heed to it, over 100,000 people signed a petition, organised by the Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, calling for it to be banned. London Labour MP George Lansbury and the Mayors of the four East London boroughs appealed directly to the Home Secretary Sir John Simon to intercede, but Simon, a vain man with little interest in what he viewed as the 'politics of the street', refused to do so.

Although there had been anti-semitism in the past, it was less obvious in the East End as people facing the same poverty and degradation banded together. In Germany, Jews were made a scapegoat as they were blamed for the loss of the First World War and for causing the depression. In England the Jarrow marches had just taken place; the class system had never been so obvious as attitudes towards depression and poverty divided the country. Angry, disillusioned people searched for who to blame for their plight. Mosley was quick to turn on the Jews starting a bitter campaign against them. The East End became the centre of his operation as he opened up offices there and appointed organisers. Phil Piratin, later MP for Stepney, described how Mosley operated: "East London was the centre of Mosley's activity. Full time

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

organisers, well provided premises, all of these were paid for. The appeal was made to the worst elements and the basest sentiments. 'Jews are taking away your jobs'. Because of the Jews 'you have no homes'. It didn't make sense, but put over with flourish and showmanship it was propaganda to gull the most backward section of the community."

The attacks on Jews, sometimes physical, increased; Mosley's campaign, according to William Fishman, later a Professor, was a "deliberate ploy", playing on irrational fears and hatred of the slum dwellers. "Fascist incursions", he related "were mounted against the Jews. Attacks on individuals and shops were stepped up as gangs of Blackshirts made daily, more often nocturnal, forays into the ghetto. East End Jews in the front line of the attack, had no alternative than to resist."

Friends turned on each other. Walter Coleman, whose father was a boot maker in Cable Street, recalled how anti-Jewish feelings began to rise, "When I was a child there was very little anti-semitism... but, as the Fascists came along, close friends who I went to school with became well known Fascists."

Mosley was determined that his cohorts would terrify the local Jewish population. Clothed in their new uniforms of black, modelled on those of the Italian Fascists, they were designed to scare and intimidate as they mounted their offensive against the Jews of Stepney. It was the first time that Mosley would wear it - a black military-cut jacket, grey riding breeches and jackboots, which he topped with a black peaked military hat and a red arm band. Plans were drawn up for them to hold a parade in Royal Mint Street, where they would be inspected by Mosley. They would then divide

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

into four columns and march through the East End to designated meeting areas at Limehouse, Shoreditch and Bow.

Mr A Levitt, whose family ran a tobacconist and sweet shop, later recalled: “The Mosley organisation was a problem at that time. They used to have a meeting every Saturday. He had a van with a loud-speaker on it. They used to draw people around. Before the battle of Cable Street we knew there was going to be trouble.”

Rumours abounded. Joe Jacobs who lived in Stepney was later to recall: “We heard a rumour that Mosley intended organising a mass march of uniformed Fascists through the heart of the Jewish area... Before these announcements the air was full of foreboding.”

The morning of the battle was sunny, a slight chill in the air, but bright and invigorating, “perfect battling weather” as it was described. William Fishman recounted what happened: “An extraordinary scene took place. From out of the narrow courts, alleyways and main thoroughfares came the steady tramp of marching feet, growing in intensity as the columns were swelled by reinforcements. A forest of banners arose, borne aloft with the watchwords **THEY SHALL NOT PASS** emblazoned in a multitude of colours, with red predominating.”

They Shall Not Pass was to become the march rallying cry. The emotional declaration made on 18 July 1936 at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War by Dolores Ibarruri Gomez, one of the leaders of the Spanish Communist party, was to be painted on walls and pavements and yelled out in fury.

Following intense pressure from local members, the Communist party had cancelled a major rally of the Communist Youth League due to have been held in support of the Spanish

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

Republicans in Trafalgar Square, and diverted its members to the East End. They were to be joined by thousands of Jews, anti-Fascists and local people, including a large contingent of Irish who lived in the same area. Train loads of Communists, ex-Jewish service men from Manchester and Leeds, veterans of war, tough men used to taking orders, flowed into Stepney. Joe Jacobs remembered: "I never saw such enthusiasm before. The air was electrified... the whole area seemed to be alive." They were all determined to stop Mosley from marching through the East End.

The protestors had little time to make their preparations, particularly as they didn't know which way Mosley was going to march. Contingency plans were drawn up which concentrated on four assembly points and routes. Cable Street, Leman Street, Gardiners Corner (Aldgate), and St George's (now The Highway) in Wapping. These routes were to be blocked whatever the costs. But the battle of Cable Street would not just be a simple battle between the anti-Fascists and the Fascists. It would be a three-way fight, as following the arrival of the Fascists and anti-Fascists, came the police, some 6,000, with men brought in from areas outside London.

Running battles began in all four areas as Fascists arrived to find the crowds confronting them, but the major fights were between anti-Fascists and the police, many of them on horseback, who charged into the crowds to clear the passage so that Mosley's men would be able to pass. The first fights broke out in Leman Street as police made baton charges to clear the way through to Gardiners Corner which marked the beginning of the major route taken by Commercial Road into the heart of Stepney. This route was blocked

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

by an immobilised tram – the first of four – and by a huge crowd of cheering and jeering people making it impossible to force a way through. Phil Piratin described the scene: “Powerless before such an effective road block, the police turned their attention elsewhere. Time and time again, they charged the crowd; the windows of neighbouring shops went in as people were pushed through them.”

St George’s Street to the south in Wapping was less attractive to the Fascists as it meant marching through a largely Catholic area. Cable Street, one of the major routes, was to become the central battle ground. If there was to be a General, someone who sent his troops in different directions, organising the demonstrators, then that man was Phil Piratin, whose home in New Street became the centre of operations. He didn’t need maps, he knew every bit of the area issuing orders where people were to go to block more police or Fascists getting in.

Cable Street itself was a narrow street, densely populated, with shops and rooms above them into which were crammed a mainly Jewish population. Local people, revolted at how their neighbours were being threatened, also came to their defence. Mrs Jones’ family had a shop in Cable Street: “The non-Jewish people surrounding us said ‘You’re nice families and we are going to see that he doesn’t get through to Cable Street’ and they gave us things to throw at them – bricks, knives, lumps of wood, anything.”

A common cause of hatred of Fascism brought people together. Charlie Goodman made a name for himself during the battle when he climbed up a lamp post, exhorting people to fight back as they began to waver, and described one alliance: “it was not just a question of Jews being there, the most amazing thing was to see

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

a silk-coated Orthodox Jew standing next to an Irish docker with a grappling iron. This was absolutely unbelievable. Because it was not a question of... a punch up between the Jews and the Fascists, it was a question of people who understood what Fascism was.”

Julie Gershon was standing at the corner of Leman Street and Whitechapel, waiting for the Fascists: “thousands of people were there early in the morning. They might have reached the beginning of Cable Street but they couldn’t get down there. People were throwing things out of their windows, anything to build up the barricades so they couldn’t pass. There were Jews and Irish, the lot, everybody was down there.”

A lorry was turned over to form a barricade along with material from a local brick yard. Further obstacles were hastily put together down the street. The police mounted an attack but were beaten time and again as a flurry of chamber pots crashed down from the top floors of the buildings surrounding them, bottles hurtled through the air. They finally managed to clear the first barricade only to find more facing them. Paving stones were pulled up as dockers waded into the fight, marbles were thrown at the horses’ hooves.

Anti-Fascist attackers directed by Piratin pushed the police back up the street, and as the violence of the skirmishes escalated, protesters were injured and arrested as police waded into them with truncheons. Horses trampled over bodies as they lay on the ground, charge after charge continued, neither side, giving way. Mr Ginsberg who lived in Cable Street was shocked at the violence: “People were knocked on the ground and the horses didn’t care who they trod on. They tried to push them back... I went to help this chap who the

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

horse had jumped on - his stomach see? He was in terrific pain. But the police were saying 'get back, get back'. They were going to hit me. I had to go back, I couldn't help the man."

Policemen were hurt too - Mrs Ginsberg remembered "we saw policemen with blood streaming down their faces. They didn't have it all their own way. It was their job to allow Mosley through. They tried but there were masses of people and it was impossible to get through even with the horses."

As police and protestors fought in Cable Street, pressure to get the demonstration banned continued as, in a last effort to get authorities to intervene, Fenner Brockway, secretary of the Independent Labour Party, rang the Home Office at 3.30 asking them to either stop the procession or to divert it. "I told the Home Office", he explained to a reporter, "that if they didn't stop or at least divert the procession it would be their responsibility."

Unbeknown to Brockway, back in Royal Mint Street, the police had already decided to stop the parade. Arriving at the scene an hour and a half after the marches should have started, Mosley was driven along the procession, described as being a half mile long, in an open car escorted by Blackshirts on motor cycles. He then walked along it as section after section of his followers cheered him. A message was passed through to him, he stopped and pushed his way through the ranks of his Blackshirts into a side street where Sir Philip Game, the Commissioner of Police, along with other high ranking police officers were waiting, and was informed of the decision.

Plans for the parade to separate into four columns that would march into the East End to arrive at various designated areas were

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

now forbidden. It was decided that the whole procession would remain together and move to the Victoria Embankment. *The Guardian* was to describe the scene: 'The Fascists marched in London yesterday - but away from the East End'. A dozen mounted police led the way, followed by a drum and bagpipe band, along the route there were other Fascist bands. Crowds followed them until they got near Westminster Bridge, where there were more scuffles that were quashed by the police.

The police were to state: "A Fascist assembly was held in the East End today, and largely owing to one of the finest days of the year, many people were attracted to it, including a large number of women and children... In view of the very large crowds, the Commissioner of the Police for the Metropolis decided that the procession through the East End should not be permitted owing to the great likelihood of further breaches of the peace."

As the police withdrew the East Enders took their streets back, people drifted into the pubs and cafes, swapping stories, binding up wounds. Debris carpeted the ground, and would do so for some weeks. Many people had been hurt and a number of people - very few of them Fascists - had been arrested.

Freddy Shaw related how his father Jack had been arrested for throwing a brick which broke a policeman's nose. "He always denied this as he was one always to use fists rather than throw missiles. He initially escaped arrest with the help of a couple of elderly women pulling him away, but was soon arrested."

Taken to Leman Street Police Station which became one of the main holding stations, Shaw was to witness police brutality: "calling all who were arrested 'Jewish bastards' whether they were or

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

not, young policemen with their sleeves rolled up were using fists and truncheons to beat up those arrested”.

Charlie Goodman was also one of those arrested and Shaw recalled his father telling him: “The swing doors of the police station suddenly burst open and my father’s good friend Charlie Goodman appeared. His head had been used like a battering ram by the four policemen who were carrying him.”

But it wasn’t only men that were manhandled by the police. Jack Shaw remembered seeing a woman being brought into the station, her blouse ripped off her as a policeman made to hit her in the face with a truncheon. “She stared straight at him and with defiance in her voice, said ‘I am not afraid of you’. The room went quiet, the policeman called her a ‘Jewish bitch’ and put her in a cell.”

Jack Shaw was one of 64 to be jailed, receiving a three month prison sentence. Months later he, Charlie Goodman and their friend Joe Garber, also a veteran of the Cable Street battle, would travel to Spain where they joined the International Brigade and fought in the Civil War.

The Mayor of Stepney, Mrs H Roberts, told a reporter that she had never seen the people of the East End so thoroughly “roused and angry”. Every avenue to Aldgate had been blocked by huge crowds of people – Christian and Jew. “I understand,” she said “that many people have been hurt and I cannot help but think that all this could have been avoided had the Home Office and the Commissioner of the Police done before the march what they were compelled to do during the march.”

The *News Chronicle* claimed that some 310,000 people had been there, though other witnesses claimed the figure had been

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

nearer to half a million. The police were to report that 84 arrests had been made, though that was reduced to 79, of which eight were women. Fifteen people were taken to the London Hospital, one was a 14 year old boy. Two girls had their hands trampled in what was described by the police as a “stampede”. Some 500 St John’s Ambulance staff treated dozens of others with slight injuries.

That night both the Communists and the Fascists held meetings in the East End. The Communist meeting was at the Shoreditch Town Hall where they heard the veteran campaigner Tom Mann, and the Fascists were in nearby Pitfield Street. It would be the last big march that Mosley would try to hold in the East End, and it would be the last to be held in military style uniform. One month later, Parliament passed the 1936 Public Order Act which banned the wearing of political uniforms in public and controlled parades. Under the Act an order was passed which had to be renewed every three months prohibiting marches in the East End. This was renewed until finally the British Union of Fascists was banned in 1940. The area itself changed as slums began to be cleared in the 1930s, and in the Second World War the East End, and in particular the area around the docks, would be destroyed or badly damaged by extensive bombing.

Mrs Beresford, whose family ran one of the best known fish and chip shops in Cable Street, talking to an interviewer many years later, was concerned that what had happened in Cable Street might happen again: “After the battle of Cable Street there was a feeling of relief. But there was a fear that it could all come up again. Why he went for the Jewish people I’ll never know. They never interfered with anybody. If they started today, who would they go for?”

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

But memories of the battle continue, participants have been interviewed and have written about it. There have been plays, murals, stories and books. The playwright Arnold Wesker, born and bred in the East End, featured the battle in his play *Chicken Soup With Barley*. A musical *Shattersongs* by Alan Gilbey was performed at the Half Moon Theatre in the late 1980s. There have been other plays, some written by the participants themselves such as Simon Blumenfeld. Phil Piratin's book *Our Flag Stays Red* and William Fishman's *A People's Journey: The Battle for Cable Street* give first hand accounts of what happened. Poems have been written, *The Battle of Cable Street* by the Tramp Poet appeared in various anthologies; television programmes produced, such as one episode in the successful BBC2 series *Yesterday's Witness* and it was featured in a programme about disturbances in BBC2's *Forbidden Britain* series. The history of the area and of the battle, are kept alive by the local community. The Cable Street Group played a prominent part in putting together a series of interviews, publications and projects to celebrate the 75th anniversary in 2016.

The Cable Street battle still has the power to raise tempers and expose deep racial undercurrents. One mural in particular caused controversy. In 1976, the Tower Hamlets Art Project, a community-led group, selected a design for a mural of the battle to be placed on the west wall of St George's Town Hall in Cable Street. Work was well underway when in 1980 Fascists climbed the scaffolding and daubed in six foot high letters *British Nationalism not Communism – Rights for Whites – Stop the Race War*. The work was finally completed in 1983. Since then it has faced more Fascist vandalism and after several incidents, and great cost, the

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

mural has been repaired and covered with a special varnish making it easier to clean off.

In 2016, the East End community and anti-Fascists and labour movement came together to rally in memory of the battle. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn told the crowds that his mother had been one of the people at the battle: “My mother stood here with thousands of local people, trade unionists, socialists, Communists, Christians, Jews, Muslims, everyone of faith and no faith, with one simple aim - to stop Oswald Mosley and his Fascists marching through the East End. She wanted to live in a world as we all do which is free from xenophobia and free from hate. To those who daub synagogues with anti-semitic graffiti or defile mosques with anti-Islamic hate or any other communities that suffer abuse or racism, we are here on the side of those communities, to defend all these communities and the multi-racial society that we want to live in.”

THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET

CABLE STREET has a rich and vibrant history, mainly due to the many people who moved into the area, often refugees from social deprivation or from religious persecution. These people brought their traditions and beliefs into what became a melting pot, which erupted into protests and violence against prejudice and intimidation at the battle of Cable Street.

Cable Street is a mile long and runs from the Tower of London in the west to Ratcliffe in the east. It skirts the City of London and Limehouse and lies in what can be described as the historical east end. It's proximity to the river is responsible for its name 'Cable'; originally a straight path along which hemp ropes were twisted to become cables for the sailing ships which would anchor in Pool of London lying between London Bridge and Wapping and Rotherhithe. Cable making was one of the main industries of the area with other 'rope walks' reflecting the demand for cables, and with a number of small manufacturers setting up workshops along their routes.

Cable Street lies in one of the oldest parts of London. The River Thames dominated the area with the town and then the City growing up around it. The area known as Wapping has its origins in Saxon times when it was known as being the settlement of the Waeppla people. Wapping itself shows up as a name in the 13th century. Cable Street for many years had different names for each part of it. Sited from west to east, these ran as Cable Street, Knock Fergus (a nod to the large Irish community), New Road, Back Lane, Blue Gate Fields, Sun Tavern Fields, and Brook Street. This lasted until Victorian times when Cable Street became the name for the whole length.

Cable Street weaves its way past or near to some of the most famous

THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET

local sites such as Wilton's Music Hall, now a listed building and the oldest surviving music hall in the country, and Wellclose Square. Just around the corner on the Stepney causeway Dr Thomas Barnado opened his Home for Destitute Boys in 1870.

Its proximity to the river and the docks undoubtedly affected the area as it became home to thieves, robbers, footpads and prostitutes; from Tudor times ordinary people were warned against venturing into the area. Cable Street's ill repute was founded on it being a centre for cheap lodgings, brothels and drinking taverns and opium dens, many linked to the docks. From Victorian days to the 1950s its reputation persisted. Oscar Wilde was known to frequent the local opium parlours, and he even sent his own character Dorian Gray to a disreputable Tavern in Cable Street, where he took a room whilst his portrait withered behind him. Arthur Conan Doyle also spent time doing research in the area visiting the opium dens which attracted his great detective Sherlock Holmes. In the 1950s, the street's clubs were run by Maltese gangs who also owned many of the strip and gambling clubs in Soho, in the West End.

Cable Street was witness to the last time that a corpse designated as a sinner had a stake hammered through its heart. In 1812 John Williams was found hanged in his cell, he had been arrested accused of carrying out a series of murders in the Ratcliffe Highway area. It was claimed he had committed suicide, which at that time was deemed a sin, resulting in Williams' body being buried upside down on the junction of Cable Street and Cannon Street Road with a stake through his heart. His skull was later found when new gas mains were laid in 1886 and was put on display in The Crown and Dolphin Pub opposite the grave.

Cable Street was first stopping off point for many refugees and immigrants. Mainly poor, some destitute, they were tightly packed, along with those local people whose lives depended on work based around the docks, into buildings at best described as slums - without running water or

THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET

toilets. Sweatshops became accepted. French Huguenots, Jews, Irish and Bengalis have all, at various times, settled in the street and neighbourhood. This often led to confrontation with the local English as rumours and complaints were made against the newcomers, often based on accusations that they were taking jobs and homes. In 1675, the English weavers of Spitalfield, just along the road from Cable Street, turned on the Huguenots accusing them of taking their jobs; the army was brought in to stop a potential massacre. The fear of job losses led to other riots and demonstrations throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; these rarely were violent. One exception was during the First World War, following the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915 when an antagonistic public turned on German-owned businesses and homes were destroyed, as were those of anyone in the Jewish community with a German sounding name. There were times too when the people came together to fight the authorities or to stand up against victimisation. In 1889 and in 1912 Jewish tailors and Irish and English dockers went on strike against low wages and stood together on the same platform. In 1911 during the Docks Strike, Jewish families took in and looked after 300 starving children until the strike ended. Unionisation and protests at sweatshops and poor pay and conditions also brought people together. Slum clearances had begun in the mid 1930s, but the area was still rated as one of those with the most poverty in London.

The street was to become well known because of the battle in October 1936 to stop the Fascists marching down it. The community spirit forged together by rent strikes, and fights against slum landlords and sweatshop owners, had brought together people from different faiths and beliefs which far outweighed any prejudices. The Communist Party, whose members such as Phil Piratin were born and raised in the area, was particularly active with 12 members elected on to the local council. After the battle several Cable Street men were to go to Spain to fight against the

THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET

Fascists, this time led by General Franco.

The Second World War with the blitz raining bombs down on the East End around the dock area added to the reputation of a close community. Led by people like Phil Piratin who fought not only the Nazis but against the authorities to get proper shelters, the local population were not scared of calling for better conditions even in time of war. Much of the area was bombed and many streets were wiped out as flames raged through the byways including Cable Street.

After the war throughout the 60s and 70s new people came into the area, this time Pakistanis and Bengalis. Old rumours based on unsupported claims that they were 'taking our homes' brought violence back to Cable Street, with members of the extreme right attacking the new immigrants. Anti-racist groups set up to take on the extreme right found great support amongst the ordinary people of the area. In 1978 Altab Ali, a young Bangladeshi textile worker, was murdered in nearby Brick Lane by three teenage National Front members. This led to the local Bangladeshi community forming itself into a self-help group, following the example of other previously victimised communities.

There are a number of blue plaques on Cable Street and other local streets. It's the people of Cable Street who make its history. Cable Street has featured in many personal battles of those who either wanted to get out of the East End or to improve life for other people. Boxing was a familiar way out of poverty, and Cable Street had its own champion, Jack 'Kid' Berg, the world light welterweight champion. Dr Hannah Billig (1901-1987) was a local doctor who earned the name 'The Angel of Cable Street' for the work she did to help the people of the area; a blue plaque marks her surgery. The aniline purple dye, mauverine, was discovered by the chemist Sir William Henry Perkin (1838-1907) working in a hut in the garden of his family's Cable Street home.

Cable Street has a rich literary past, residents include the poet and

THE HISTORY OF CABLE STREET

painter Isaac Rosenberg, who was killed in 1918 whilst fighting in the First World War, and the playwright Arnold Wesker. Wesker's play *Chicken Soup With Barley* was set in the street, recalling memories of his childhood and Jewish life. 'Everything happens in Cable Street', a line from the play, was to become the title of Roger Mills' book about the area.

It's still a close community and The Cable Street Group has done much to keep alive the memories, histories and traditions of the people who have lived in the area, as has David Rosenberg, whose book *Battle for the East End*, has become the definitive account of Jewish response to Fascism in the 1930s. He still leads a series of walks through the area which brings to life what happened in the past. And every year people come to Cable Street to follow the route of the battle.

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

THE rise of Fascism in Europe saw a union of far right ideologies, formed from anger and fury emanating from the Versailles Treaty at the end of the First World War when heavy retribution was levied on the losing countries. New countries and borders were created, and areas like the industrial Ruhr and the Saarland were occupied by allied forces as the Germans were penalised by a vengeful France forcing them towards economic depression. Fascism flourished in countries such as newly formed Germany, as well as in Italy that had only in the previous century been created by bringing together principalities and states, and where the values and institutions of liberal democracy were still tenuous. The hefty financial repayments led to unrest from both the civilian population and military institutions, as thousands of soldiers and workers were thrown on the streets, destabilising newly set up governments.

The end of the First World War and the establishment of the USSR saw a seismic shift in international relations as countries in Eastern Europe grouped around Russia casting off old tyrannies and looking for change, moved towards Communism; and countries like Italy and Germany to the far right. Fascist parties were able to build their campaigns around the bitterness felt against the perceived causes of their various national crises, and to turn on and fight their common enemies, the Communists, trade unionists, liberal democrats and Jews. Fascists declared that these groups had caused the war and lost it, and were to blame for all the problems emanating from defeat, and were accused of being corruptions of the authentic will and racial purity - Germany's interpretation - of their nations.

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

Most countries had some form of Fascist Party. In the UK it was the British Union of Fascists led by Oswald Mosley, whose defeat in Cable Street made the establishment take action against his quasi paramilitary group; and in Ireland, the Blue Shirts. The major countries with Fascist parties that took control, were Spain with Franco's Falange, Germany with the Nazis under Adolf Hitler, and Japan. Portugal also adopted its own system of Fascism in 1932 under Salazar and would remain independent and neutral.

The first country to adopt Fascism was Italy. The Italian National Fascist Party under Benito Mussolini was the first to rightfully be described as Fascist. Founded in 1915 as the Fascist Revolutionary Party, it was succeeded by the National Fascist Party in 1921, led by Benito Mussolini, 'Il Duce', as Dictator, who controlled Italy from 1922 to 1943. Mussolini would later, as leader of the Republican Fascist Party, rule the Italian Social Republic from 1943 to 1945. Following the Second World War, the party would metamorphose into the Italian Social Movement and later into Italian Neo-Fascist movements.

Fascism was set up on the principle of nationalist unity to fight against socialism and Communism. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini did not at that time support racialism seeing it as a diversion – though this would change and new anti-Jewish laws were later enacted. Mussolini wanted to create a new Roman Empire. His founding of the party and its takeover of power would become a template for Hitler when he set up his own.

In 1919 Mussolini formed his combat groups who intimidated and beat up any opponents, mainly Communists, and went on to win 2% of the vote in the General Election. Two years later Mussolini founded the NFP. From that point on Mussolini demanded to rule Italy. In 1922 after a march on Rome the King caved in and made him Prime Minister. Laws were changed and opponents assassinated as Mussolini grabbed power. Although the Senate still operated its only duties were to ratify the decrees

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

sent down to them by Mussolini. Its members, all in the Fascist party, were given life membership of the Senate. Fascists were appointed to all ruling bodies. Newspapers were closed and press censorship introduced. Private enterprise was encouraged and strikes and trade unions were banned.

By 1926 all other political parties had been banned and a secret police force had been set up. In 1929 the Vatican, seeking to use the Fascists as a force against Communism, signed the Lateran Treaty. There would be little criticism as the country became a dictatorship where the Fascist party was in complete control of the judiciary, industry and government. There was still a King, but he ruled in name only.

Although Hitler admired Mussolini, the latter was to come into conflict with him on several issues. The first in 1934 saw Mussolini opposing the unification of Austria and Germany, and in 1935 joining the 'Stresa Front' with Britain and France to oppose German rearmament and expansion. The same year Mussolini's crusade to set up another Roman empire saw him invading Abyssinia in an unprovoked attack. The use of mustard gas and bombs against unarmed people drew worldwide condemnation but little effective opposition.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War brought a realignment of powers as Germany and Italy sided with Franco to defeat the democratically elected government. Arms were poured into the country along with 'advisers' to help the Fascist forces. Italian Communists, already driven from their country, joined the International Brigades and fought against him in Spain. In November, the 'Rome-Berlin Axis', the first treaty with Germany, was signed. A year later Italy, Germany and Japan signed the 'Anti-Comintern Pact', uniting the three countries in their aim to defeat the USSR.

Next country on Mussolini's list was Albania which he successfully invaded in April 1939, replacing its King with King Emmanuel of Italy. A month later the Italian and German foreign ministers signed the 'Pact of

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

Friendship and Alliance' better known as the 'Pact of Steel'. But when it actually came to supporting Germany when it invaded Poland resulting in France and Britain's declaration of war, Mussolini was more reticent - initially declaring Italy neutral. In 1940, believing that a German victory was inevitable, Italy finally entered the war invading Egypt where their troops were crushed by British forces. From that point Mussolini was linked to Hitler in a war that was gradually expanding to involve all the continents.

The German path to Nazi dictatorship was less smooth. Germany had felt the full brunt of the Versailles Treaty as the allies, and in particular France, demanded harsh reparations. Its manufacturing and industrial bases were occupied by the French, and its ruler Kaiser Willy was made to abdicate as a new republic - 'The Weimar Republic' - was set up. But the new liberal democratic republic floundered when it tried to rule as a background of hostility arose to overwhelm it. The Nazi party's rise to power is also attributed to a mixture of factors and events that happened outside Germany. The party's strength and the weaknesses of the other parties and of the Weimar republic itself all played a part in ensuring that in 1933 Hitler legitimately gained power to become Chancellor.

Hitler first became politically active in September 1919 when he joined The Deutsche Arbeiterpartei - the DAP - German Workers Party, which a year later became the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the NSDAP, the National Socialist German Workers Party, better known as the Nazi Party. Socialist was a misnomer. It was anti-Marxist and vehemently against the liberal democratic Weimar republic and the Versailles Treaty. It promoted extreme nationalism and a united Germany which included all its old territories, and others with Germanic populations. It was virulently anti-semitic. A superb propagandist, Hitler's rise to leadership was mainly based on his charismatic way of speaking which attracted hundreds, then thousands, to hear him. He demanded leadership and he got it. Rightwing ex-soldiers, the disaffected and angry,

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

joined his ranks. Hitler emulated many of the practices carried out by Mussolini but made German racial purity one of his central planks. Thugs, mainly found among the unemployed, were formed into the Brownshirts whose aim was to beat up and intimidate Communists, socialists and Jews. The spread of fear became one of the Nazi party's most successful *modus operandi*.

Inspired by Mussolini's march on Rome, Hitler, whose base was in Munich, on 8 and 9 November 1923, led what became known as the Beer Hall Putsch when he attempted a coup d'état. Four police officers and 16 NSDAP members were killed. Hitler was put on trial for high treason in November 1923 and in 1924 was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Landsberg Prison. He was allowed to use a private secretary and used the time to write *Mein Kampf* - my struggle - which became the bible for the German Nazis. Anyone reading the book at the time could have had no doubt as to his aims as he detailed his hatred of the Jews, socialists and Communists and outlined plans for what would be a new Germania. Hitler also decided that in future his party would enter the main political arena and win power that way. He would back up his political ambitions surrounded by his own private army - the *Sturmabteilung*. Street fighting would increase as open warfare raged between the Nazis and the Communists.

In 1929, the Wall Street crash caused a world-wide economic depression which destroyed the German economy as America called in all its foreign loans, and led to the downfall of the Weimar republic. Unemployment rose to six million. Before the Wall Street crash the Nazis had polled less than 3% of the popular vote, but as the Weimar's reputation of being stable and prosperous collapsed the Nazis increased their popularity. In July 1930 Chancellor Brüning, head of a centre right party, cut wages, government expenditure and unemployment pay. The Reichstag - the German parliament - refused to support this with the result

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

that President Hindenburg used what was described as an enabling act, Article 48, which gave him powers to make decrees. Hitler in the meantime had appealed to the people to give him power as the Weimar republic was incapable of running the country. Support gradually built up for him as conservatives, including industrialists alarmed at the possibility of the Communists taking over, formed alliances with Hitler believing that they could work with him and that he would produce a stable regime. In the July 1932 elections, the Nazis became the largest party in the Reichstag but without a majority.

A month earlier Hindenburg, a conservative monarchist of the old school, with the support of Hitler appointed Catholic conservative Von Papen as chancellor. But after the election Hitler demanded the post. Hindenburg refused to give it to him, Von Papen dissolved parliament, and in November Hitler faced a setback as his party lost seats and votes. Von Papen was sacked by Hindenburg after he tried to rule by decree and was replaced by Kurt von Schleicher, another conservative. Von Papen, angry at his betrayal by Hindenburg, concluded an agreement with Hitler which would see Hitler being made chancellor with himself as the vice chancellor. Hitler advocated expenditure instead of austerity which brought him support from a group of 22 leading industrialists who wrote to Hindenburg asking him to appoint Hitler as Chancellor as they backed his plans for expansion and investment.

On 30 January 1933 Hitler was sworn in as chancellor. On 24 November 1933 after the Reichstag fire, which burnt down the parliament building and gave Hitler the excuse to arrest thousands of political opponents and suspend civil liberties, he got the Reichstag members to vote for the Enabling Act that gave him full dictatorial powers to rule Germany. On the death of Hindenberg, he would dispense with the presidential position and turn Germany into a Fascist state.

Supported by the people, who desperately wanted stability, inflation

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

and unemployment were controlled with the state playing a major role in managing the economy. The German economic system remained capitalist, powers given to the state allowed it to dictate where people should work, and sometimes what the industrialists should produce.

Under Fascism, trade unions were wiped out and their leaders imprisoned in newly built concentration camps, where they were joined by members of the opposition, writers, journalists, socialists, Jews and Communists. There was to be no opposition in Germany. All elections, local and national, were abolished, only the odd referendum was allowed. The judiciary, as in Italy, was taken over with only those who were members of the Nazi party, or were fellow travellers, appointed to its courts. Papers closed with only Nazi papers allowed to publish. School lessons and books were run by Nazi teachers and texts rewritten by Nazis. All information that Germans received was selected and organised to support Fascist beliefs.

In 1934 Hitler signed an agreement with Pope Pius XI in which he promised not to interfere in religion. In return the Catholic church agreed not to become involved in politics in Germany. Dissenting priests and members of other religions were imprisoned or later executed. Mussolini had signed a similar agreement with the Pope.

Secure in his country's support, and with complete control of the state, Hitler marched back into the Ruhr and Saarland and rearmed and built up his armed services as he began his series of territorial demands which would lead to the establishment of what he saw as the Great Germania which would include all the Germanic races. His grand belief in the perfect race - German - would see plans to make the whole of Europe subservient to his wishes, plans which had been outlined in *Mein Kampf* and mainly ignored. Top of his list had been his hatred for the Jews, and by the time he committed suicide in 1945 over six million had been murdered along with gypsies, homosexuals, and anyone considered as being sub-human.

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

There were few areas that the Fascists didn't try and dictate or interfere with. Both the German and Italian Fascists believed women were subservient to men and established narrow roles for them. They were expected to sacrifice and join organisations to raise money for Fascist causes, but they were not allowed to question their roles or allowed to make policy. They were made to give up their jobs, stay home and breed children for the state; eventually as men were called up in Germany, women were drafted in to work in factories. Breeding camps were even set up where women were selected to mate with SS soldiers and to have babies who were racially pure.

In Italy Mussolini claimed that 12 children was the ideal number for the family; and imposed a tax on 'unjustified celibacy' and tried to introduce another on childless marriages.

Fascist parties were set up in most countries. But it was in countries like Austria, one of the countries carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, that the clash between the socialists and the right saw open warfare as the army battled it out in Vienna on the Communist housing estates. Labour MP Hugh Gaitskill, later leader of his party, and the writer Naomi Mitchisson, along with left wingers like Evelyn Brown (later to be married to Jack Jones) smuggled documents and money into the country to try and rescue trade unionists and socialists as the resistance collapsed. In 1933, Engelbert Dollfuss, leader of the country, dissolved parliament and established a quasi-Fascist dictatorship until Austria was incorporated into Nazi Germany after the Anschluss of 1938 when the Nazi party took control following a weighted referendum. Austrian action against its Jews was even more intense than Germany's had been until then.

Spain and Portugal, who had both remained independent and neutral during the Second World War, were the only countries where Fascism would last until the 1970s. Franco, supported by Germany and Italy, had won the civil war and subsequently adopted the same Fascist system to rule

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

his country. Thousands were imprisoned, many executed and press freedom banned. Franco's actions would be directed against the Communists, socialists and trade unionists, but his form of Fascism did not encompass the racial hatred of the German model. Eventually, on the death of Franco and the restoration of the monarch, the country would return to democracy and freedom. Portugal's more lenient Fascist regime would finish in 1974 following a peaceful mutiny by left wing military officers.

Most countries, such as Great Britain with long standing democratically elected governments, were well established as viable entities with long histories and defined character, and rejected the pseudo military type groups and outlandish political theories. France, the Netherlands, Britain, Belgium, Ireland and most European countries had Fascist parties, but they were never allowed to have political power. The public may have admired what they perceived as a successful transition of a state from anarchy to stability but gradually they reacted against the oppression and anti-semitism; they would fight the conquerors and reject the Fascists who tried to take power in their own countries. Fascist parties would flourish in those countries invaded by Germany and Italy but would be treated with disdain by the majority of the public. Eventually Fascism would be defeated as free people fought against it.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

ON Tuesday 29 October 1929 the New York stock market crashed bankrupting thousands and leaving millions out of work. The crash was to wreck the economies of developed countries across the world.

The Great Depression, as it became known, was an economic slump in North America, Europe and other industrialised areas of the world, including Japan. It had a devastating effect on Germany where it brought about the fall of the new Weimar Republic, produced mass unemployment, and from the chaos provided the Nazis with the opportunity to seize control of the country. In the UK unemployment rose from 1.2 million in mid-1929 to 2.7 million by the summer of 1931. Hunger marches from the north to London highlighted the poverty which was felt throughout the country, including the East End and the area around Cable Street. Stepney was to be recorded as having one of the highest levels of poverty in London. Lasting until about 1939, it was the longest and the most severe economic depression ever experienced by the industrialised western world. It was one of the most significant, if not the single most important, factors in changing the politics of Europe pushing it further along the path to war.

The depression originated in the USA after a major fall in stock prices which began on 4 September 1929, and developed into the stock market crash of 29 October, known to all as Black Tuesday. Countries all around the world, particularly those that depended on heavy industry, were hit hardest, with construction being halted in most countries. Agriculture was also hit as prices plummeted, and in America whole areas of farmland were destroyed by droughts hitting the central belt, which became known

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

as the Dust Bowl. Other industries such as mining were also hit, and with them the chance of other sources of employment.

Germany, decimated by reparations after the First World War and led by the Weimar government, had enjoyed five years of prosperity propped up by loans from America; now millions of Germans were unemployed as companies and businesses folded or shut down. The economy reeled out of control as American investors began to 'call in' their foreign loans; at the same time the United States, one of the major importers of German goods, raised tariffs. Banks went out of business as the currency crashed. With notes becoming little more than waste paper, savings were wiped out. By 1932 German industrial production had fallen to just above half the 1928 levels. Within months of the stock market crash around one and a half million Germans were unemployed, a year later that figure had doubled and by early 1933 six million, over a quarter of the population from all classes, were out of work.

The left wing Weimar government with all its bright ideas, having failed to deal with the depression, fell. The population lost faith in the mainstream parties and looked to more radical alternatives such as Communism and National Socialism, with Adolf Hitler becoming the main beneficiary as industry bosses and the elite supported him. His four year plan of 1936 to reshape private household consumption was aimed at achieving German economic self-sufficiency. The seeds of war were laid in his plans to bring the country out of the depression.

In the United Kingdom, unemployment rose to two and half million, a quarter of the population, as heavy industry, which had failed to be updated or modernised at the end of the First World War, was hit by the increased tariffs and by competition from other countries. Whole communities were destroyed as men were made redundant when industries such as coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding were shut down. Jarrow entered labour and trade union history as its people marched to London

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

in a crusade to get the government to provide jobs and to come up with a plan to bring work and livelihoods to the area. Instead they were told by an inept government to go home. In 1931 the Labour government first reacted to the pressures of the Great Depression with fiscal authority, seeking to 'balance the budget', cutting public sector wages and benefits. Despite this pressure on sterling the exchange rate continued to mount and in September 1931 it was forced to abandon the 'Gold Standard' resulting in the fall of that government. Coming off the Gold Standard allowed interest rates to fall, providing a monetary stimulus that had previously been unavailable; plus a sharp decline in the value of sterling helped to support Britain's manufacturing exporters in particular. Fiscal policy also became more expansionary.

A new National Government was formed under Labour leader Ramsay Macdonald which increased tax, cut back on unemployment benefit and introduced means testing, as well as adding import duties to goods from abroad. A plan to bring 'light industries to distressed areas' was enacted in the Special Areas Act of 1934, and local councils pumped money into the economy by building 500,000 council homes under a widespread slum clearance scheme. Other benefits such as curtailing excess working hours and the nationalisation of coal mining royalties were introduced later to help bolster the economy and improve working conditions.

Recovery from the Great Depression for most countries, including Germany and England, began in 1933 as it did in America, though there it would last until the Second World War. Germany would try to end the depression by seeking new political ideas. Growth in the UK had initially been slow, raising antagonism amongst all classes. This was seized upon by Mosley as being his opportunity to exploit dissatisfaction, blaming Jews and socialists for the financial misfortune, and to try to provide a new form of Fascist politics. The people of the East End in Cable Street, and others

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

throughout the country, resisted these arguments turning to improvements in fiscal policy instead of dictatorship.

By 1939 the depression had come to an end, and a new economy was being formed which would deliver what was needed to fight the Second World War.

OSWALD MOSLEY

AND THE

BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS

OSWALD MOSLEY, leader of the British Union of Fascists, had expected his march through Cable Street to show the strength of his party and to intimidate Jews, helping to establish his dominance as a party similar to the Nazis. Instead it would end with his members being stopped by the East Enders, and with the Police Commissioner turning on him and banning his demonstration.

Born into a wealthy country background, a First World War hero who served as a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party, and then as an Independent and finally for the Labour Party, Mosley would serve as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and be tipped as a future Prime Minister. But his career would end in ignominy and he would serve time in jail.

Oswald Mosley was a man of contradictions. He was described by the commentator Malcolm Muggeridge as being an “earnest, rather humourless man; a bit of a bore, but in no way abhorrent; just rather dreary, like a Jehovah’s witness”. The writer Hugh Purcell thought otherwise: “He was wrong, quite wrong about Mosley. He was both charismatic and dangerous”.

Mosley was born on 16 November 1896 into a wealthy Anglo-Irish family; his father was a baronet and Oswald would inherit his title. Known to his family and close friends as Tom, Mosley was educated at Winchester College entering the Royal Military College at Sandhurst in January 1914, but was expelled in June for a ‘riotous act of retaliation’ against a fellow

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF

student. On the advent of war he was commissioned into the army and fought on the Western front. He transferred into the Royal Flying Corps as an observer and showing off crashed in front of his family. He returned to the trenches and fought at the Battle of Loos. Before his injury fully mended, he was to collapse at his post and spend the rest of the war in the Ministry of Munitions and at the Foreign Office.

War's ending found the 21 year old Mosley choosing to go into politics as a Conservative. Vehemently opposed to war, he spoke passionately against it; and in December 1918 he was elected as MP for Harrow, becoming the youngest MP. He was quick to establish a reputation as a fine orator, capable of speaking without notes, and as a political manipulator. His future looked promising as in 1920 he married Lady Cynthia Curzon, daughter of the former ViceRoy of India and Foreign Secretary. The King and Queen attended the marriage along with other royalty and politicians.

His membership of the Conservative party was to last for only a few more years as he clashed with them over their Irish policy. He left, crossing the floor to sit as an Independent, and in the elections of 1922 and 1923 continued to hold the seat in that guise. The *Westminster Gazette* described him as 'the most polished speaker in the Commons, words flow from him in graceful epigrammatic phrases that have a sting in them for the government and the Conservatives'.

Growing closer to the Labour party, that had just formed a government, Mosley joined the party in March. After a bitter fight in October when he stood and lost to Neville Chamberlain in Birmingham Ladywood he retreated to write his proposals for a new economic policy for the Independent Labour Party; known as the Birmingham Proposals they would form the centrepiece of his economic policy for the rest of his life. In a 1924 by-election he was returned as the Labour MP for Smethwick. Close to Labour leader Ramsay Macdonald he expected to be

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF

promoted to a senior ministerial post when Labour won the 1929 election; instead he was given the position of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a position without portfolio and outside the cabinet. Although he was given the job of solving the growing unemployment problem, he found that his proposals were blocked by either his boss James Henry Thomas or by the cabinet itself. His plans were radical in that they called for the nationalisation of main industries, for a programme of public works to give work to the unemployed and for the imposition of high tariffs to protect British industry from international finance. Presented in the *Mosley Memorandum*, his proposals were rejected by the cabinet leading to Mosley resigning from his position. At that year's October conference, attempts by him to get the party to adopt his plans were defeated. Years later Richard Crossman was to describe the memorandum as "brilliant, a whole generation ahead of Labour thinking".

He left the party to found the 'New Party', which in subsequent by-elections split the Labour vote, allowing the Tories to win seats they would have struggled to gain. Support for the party and his economic proposals did come from both Labour and Conservative politicians, these included Aneurin Bevan and Harold MacMillan; some joined the party. Harold Harmsworth, later Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, threw his support behind Mosley. But the New party, which was gradually beginning to move towards Fascist policies, was wiped out as an effective parliamentary party when it lost seats previously held; their authoritarian basis lost the party support as members left. Later the actions of Fascists in the Spanish Civil War would cause repercussions in the press and the arts, with much criticism and condemnation increasing the level of hostility towards the party.

His defeat in 1931 spurred Mosley into wanting to learn more about the Italian Fascist party and its leader Mussolini. He visited Italy and on his return in 1932 determined to unite the British Fascists, set up the British

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF

Union of Fascists, the BUF, modelling his style of leadership on Hitler and Mussolini. By then his marriage to Cynthia had broken down and he was heavily involved with Diana Mitford who supported and encouraged him in his right wing politics. Her sister Unity would later introduce him to her “hero” Adolf Hitler and after Cynthia’s death, the couple would marry in Goebbels’ house, with Hitler as a guest. The BUF, which was mainly financed by Mosley himself, was anti-semitic, anti-Communist and anti-Zionist. Deeply nationalistic and pro-dictatorship, it was initially supported by both the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*; the former’s was very short lived, publishing only two pieces before it launched a series of attacks on the ruling German Nazi Party. The *Mail*’s was to continue longer with headlines supporting and praising Mosley and his party, as it would Hitler and the Nazis.

The party’s membership rapidly rose to some 50,000 as the discontented joined its ranks. Anger against the depression proved to be useful in recruiting new members. Initially Mosley held meetings and rallies outside London in the most deprived areas such as Stockton-on-Tees, but as local Communists and Jewish groups rallied against them and disrupted the meetings, Mosley, following the example of Mussolini, set up a paramilitary group of black uniformed stewards ‘the Blackshirts’ to protect his meetings and to intimidate any opposition. Lack of interest, and united action against him gradually forced Mosley to concentrate on London and other large cities.

The brutality of his Blackshirts, particularly as displayed at one major rally held at Olympia, Kensington on 7 June 1934, turned many of the previous supporters such as Rothermere against him. The injuries meted out to protestors and the battle between Fascists and the Communists and Jews shocked everyone. Julie Gershon whose family lived in Cable Street was years later to describe what happened to some of her friends: “A lot of our boys got in and we didn’t recognise them when they came out, they

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF

were beaten up so bad. Their faces were like balloons, you just didn't recognise them". Phil Piratin, later one of the organisers at the battle for Cable Street, joined the Communist party after that meeting. In 1945 he would be elected as an MP for the Communist party.

Despite the bad publicity which led to the loss of supporters and members including, eventually, the withdrawal of his paper's support by Rothermere, Mosley continued to receive backing from the novelist Henry Williamson and other right wing intellectuals. In the 1935 election, having decided not to stand, Mosley ran a campaign calling upon voters to abstain for "Fascism next time".

Mosley continued with his rallies and marches. But it was the battle of Cable Street that saw the Police Commissioner, having agreed to the demonstration, cancel it when he saw the running battles between the local people - supported by people from all over London - and the police as they tried to protect the Blackshirts. It was the first time that Mosley himself would wear the Fascist uniform including a red arm band, and it would be the first time that one of Mosley's demonstrations was stopped by the police. Later that year the Public Order Act, that came into effect on 1 January 1937, was passed and banned the wearing of political uniforms and quasi-military style organisations. The BUF, which had changed its name in 1936 to the British Unions of Fascists and National Socialists, reflecting the impact that Hitler and the German National Socialist Party had on him, still played a political role standing in 1937 in three wards in the London County Council elections, polling a quarter of the vote, but failing to win any seats.

In attempts to clean up the BUF image, Mosley made most of the Blackshirt employees redundant. Many of them, disgusted, left the party along with William Joyce, better known later to the public as Lord Haw Haw, to form the National Socialist League. Yet again Mosley changed the name of his party, this time to British Union, though it continued to be

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BUF

known to most as the BUF. Its membership began to build up again as Mosley swung his support behind Edward VIII (the Duke of Windsor) and campaigned against a second world war. Money donated secretly from the Nazis helped to fund the party. On 16 July 1939 Mosley staged his most successful rally 'Britain First' at Earls Court; claims were made that it was the biggest political rally ever to be held in this country, members swore to fight for Britain if it was attacked, but declared they would not lay down their lives for the Jews who, they claimed, would have started the conflict.

The outbreak of war saw Mosley campaign for a negotiated peace, winning him public support; but after the failed Norwegian campaign that support turned into hatred towards him which hardened with the advent of the Blitz. On 23 May 1940, one month after Churchill became Prime Minister, Mosley and his wife along with 1,769 others, were arrested under Defence Regulation 18B. They were imprisoned together in Holloway Prison where they lived for most of the rest of the war. Other Fascists were also arrested, and the BUF was proscribed. The couple were released from prison in November 1943 and spent the remaining months of the war under house arrest. His war time arrest and Fascist beliefs finished his credibility as a politician. From now on, despite attempts to stand again and to run a party, he would be treated as an outsider.

After the war Mosley formed the Union Movement which called for Europe to become a single nation state. The Movement's meetings were physically disrupted leading Mosley to decide to leave the country and to live in France. He returned to stand in the 1959 General Election on an anti-immigration racist platform and later in the 1966 General Election; he was decisively beaten both times. Mosley returned to France where he died in 1977.

PHIL PIRATIN

PHIL PIRATIN, a brilliant organiser and Communist, was one of the most successful leaders of the battle to stop the Blackshirts at Cable Street. He was also one of the few Communists to become an MP when he was elected to parliament in 1945. Piratin and Willie Gallacher were elected as a landside vote of returning soldiers saw Labour, with its radical nationalisation programme, being swept into power. Gallacher from the Clydeside had been elected 10 years earlier. Piratin was elected to represent the area that he came from, and for which he had worked so hard: the Mile End division of Stepney.

Forming a parliamentary party, officially recognised by the Speaker, the two Communists became a formidable alliance; Gallacher became the leader, and Piratin, the chief whip. "It's quite simple", Piratin explained years later, "He was older than me. Comrade Gallacher decided policy and I made sure he carried it out."

Piratin's background was in the East End. He was born at 2 Coke Street, Stepney on 15 May 1907 into a poverty stricken Russian immigrant orthodox Jewish family; his father had to pawn his books to pay for the midwife. The family moved a few years later around the corner to Greenfield Street, and Piratin lived in the East End for the whole of his life. Educated at Davenant Foundation School, he was to show early hints of rebellion clashing with his father's religious beliefs during the First World War. He was angry that in Britain the chief Rabbi was calling on Jews to fight in the army, whilst at the same time the German Chief Rabbi was calling on German Jews to do the same. He abhorred the fact that Jews were being called upon to fight each other. He remembered his father's stories about the iniquities and repression that Jews in Russia has suffered. Anti-semitism was still much in evidence in Great Britain, though shrouded

PHIL PIRATIN

in a thin veneer of civilisation. Some professions were still closed to Jews, and they faced discrimination if they moved into more popular affluent areas, leading Jews to cluster in areas such as the East End where they felt safe.

Piratin, originally wanted to be an architect, but lack of money meant that he had to find a job in the fur trade so that his income could help his family; unhappy with work and his home life he left, holding down a number of jobs, even spending time at sea before settling down, going into business and getting married.

Poverty and deprivation had a powerful effect upon him, the General Strike of 1926 and the hunger marches, plus unemployment drew him towards agitating against inequality. The sight of men walking in rags, hungry on the marches led him to providing and finding supplies to help one contingent that was put up in Stepney; it was the first time he was to show how efficient he was at organising help for those who were unfortunate. Trips to the Whitechapel Library with its wide range of books on political and social issues – he was much impressed by Bertrand Russell – and lectures from people such as T A Jackson opened out different political beliefs to him.

His inclination was towards Communism, and not Labour which was then in turmoil as its leaders flirted with and then joined the National Government. He was to say later that if anyone had asked him to join the Communist party at that time he would have done so. But no one did. As a Jew he was aware of the strident anti-semitism of the Nazis, the Italian Fascists, and in England that of Mosley's Blackshirts. On 7 June 1934, Piratin was protesting outside the Olympia Indoor Arena as Mosley held a mass rally. The meeting developed into chaos as the Blackshirts turned on the protesters beating up hundreds of them; the police turned on the demonstrators stopping them from piling into the arena to rescue the outnumbered men being manhandled viciously inside. Piratin was to hear

PHIL PIRATIN

one of the police yell out: "Get back to your slums, you Communist bastards". He returned to Stepney and promptly joined the Communist party. Years later he wrote: "That night I was proud of the anti-Fascists, the working class, and particularly the Communist party. I could have kicked myself for not being a member of a party whose lead I was so proud to follow."

Stepney at that time was a slum, and Piratin began to be widely recognised as one of the most dynamic local leaders, organising rent strikes which thousands took part in against money-grabbing landlords who preyed on the families desperate for accommodation in the over-crowded run down area; and fighting for better wages and conditions in sweat shops and factories. He also promoted the ideals of the vibrant local CP, selling and distributing their paper *The Daily Worker*. First attempts at public speaking were not so successful, and it would be a few more years before he would return to making speeches, this time more successfully making his name as fighter and leader for the local community.

The battle of Cable Street, and Piratin's skill in organising the people to block approaches to the area and to deal with the police, cemented his reputation further. His home in New Road became one of the centres of operation as Piratin deployed a network of 'spotters' and messengers, set up first aid points and organised protestors, sending them to the places where he needed demonstrators to take on the Fascists and to block roads.

In 1937, he was the first Communist to be elected to Stepney Borough Council, and became chairman of the borough's Communist party. He described Stepney as being like a 'political arena'. The Spanish Civil War had radicalised many young men, and several had gone to fight in Spain for the Republicans, many returning angry at the rise in Fascism. War was in the air, and the Communist party agitated for peace. Piratin himself volunteered as an air raid warden as shelters were erected and the country geared up for war.

PHIL PIRATIN

War broke out on 3 September. The Communist party and Piratin, concerned that the aims of the working class would be ignored during war time, continued with their political activities. Piratin tried to join the Royal Navy but despite appeals to Herbert Morrison, newly appointed Home Secretary, he was turned down and instead continued working as an air raid warden.

Angered by the conditions in the shelters for working people compared to those erected for the wealthy, he organised an invasion by 70 men, women and children into the luxury shelter under the Savoy Hotel. Once there they demanded tea, bread and butter, but were told minimum charges were two shillings and six pence. Piratin went into action with negotiations, resulting in waiters and management serving tea and bread and butter on silver trays at twopence, the going rate at Lyons. This was seen as a major propaganda coup. The Communist party calling upon the government to open the tube stations as shelters launched a major campaign, breaking down the gates as air raid sirens roared allowing people to pour in to safety below the streets. The government caved in and from then on the tubes were opened, bunks were put in and refreshments and first aid provided.

Piratin, was later to become the Communist party organiser in West Middlesex where he played a major part in increasing production in arms and aircraft production. "Good morning, Phil" became his greeting from the sentry.

Piratin's election to parliament saw him and Gallacher fight hard for better workers' conditions. One of his proudest achievements was to table a Private Member's Bill on safety in employment. Supported by Labour MPs he was to withdraw it when the Minister of Labour agreed to incorporate some of its points in the Labour government's programme. A less happy experience came later when he was censured by the Commons Committee for Privileges following a fight with a journalist, whom he

PHIL PIRATIN

claimed had abused him as both a Jew and as a Communist. The journalist was also censured.

Although he formed good relations with some of the Labour MPs who were sympathetic with his politics, he and Gallacher came under attack for their support for Russia during the Cold War and their opposition to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In 1948, Piratin's book *The Flag Stays Red*, an account of anti-Fascist activity in London in the 1930s and 1940s was published to wide acclaim. In 1950, Piratin lost his seat as Labour lost the election. Austerity had lasted too long.

After defeat he became the circulation manager of the *Daily Worker*. In 1956 over 7,000 members of the CP left the party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Although Piratin stayed a member, he resigned from all his official positions and left his employment with the *Daily Worker*.

He started his own business, remaining a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain until it dissolved in 1991, later becoming a supporter of the Democratic Left. Piratin died on 10 December 1995.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

“No Paseran – They shall not pass”, the declaration made on 16 July 1936 by Dolores Ibarruri Gomez, better known to the Spanish people and those who fought in Spain as ‘La Passionara’, became the rallying cry for those determined to stop Oswald Mosley and the Blackshirts in Cable Street.

The call made by Ibarruri on the radio “It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees” was to echo down the years as the left and Communists battled against Nazis and Fascists. The words would be scrawled on walls and pavements and painted on banners. The Spanish Civil War, sometimes described as the last battle of beliefs, was to have a profound effect upon many of the people of the left, and upon those of the East End. Young men would leave the safe streets of London to flock to Spain to fight in the International Brigades in defence of a legitimately elected government against a right wing rebellion mounted by General Franco and his nationalists.

2,300 volunteers from Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth were to fight in Spain as members of the International Brigades. Some 200 of them were Jewish and around 60 of them were from the East End. Many of them like Charlie Goodman, Bill Alexander – an industrial chemist who would later become the last commander of the British battalion – Joe Shaw and David Loman, a rag and bone man, had battled against Mosley and his Blackshirts in Cable Street. Others like Jack Jones, a docker in Liverpool who had been savagely beaten up by Mosley’s Blackshirts in his home city volunteered, and were determined to fight Fascists abroad. To them the fight against Franco was a way of continuing the battle against all Nazis and Fascists; they may have defeated Mosley in Britain, but in Germany, Italy

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

and Spain, the right was rampant, and in Austria the left had been defeated. Some 40,000 men and women from over 50 countries in Europe and from the USA travelled to Spain to form the International Brigades that would fight alongside the republicans.

The Spanish Civil War began in February 1936, when the left wing party the Popular Front won the national elections, with Manuel Azana Diaz being appointed as president; the following month the right wing Falange Party was banned, leading to street riots, strikes and general anarchy in some areas of Spain. In July, just three months before the battle of Cable Street, there was a series of military uprisings in Spanish Morocco, which led to the government dissolving the regular army. General Franco, supported by many of the generals and right wing politicians, arrived in Morocco to take charge of what was now a full scale rebellion. Hitler and Mussolini were quick to offer him support providing him with German and Italian planes to airlift the troops to the mainland. In response Stalin agreed to help provide arms and materials to Spain's legitimate government. Artillery advisers were sent with the warning to stay out of the 'range of artillery fire'.

In August the British government, concerned that the Spanish Civil War might escalate into a full scale European war, announced that no other country should send aid to Spain. A Non-Intervention Committee with representatives from Germany, Italy, France and the USSR present met; only France and Great Britain were not to participate in the Spanish Civil War; in France this would lead to riots in the streets as angry leftists called on their government to sell planes to the embattled legitimate government. It became evident that although Germany, Italy and the USSR were circumspect about openly sending actual men, multiple groups of advisers, particularly pilots, were being sent; they were testing out manoeuvres and armaments in a rehearsal for what many saw as a forthcoming war between the three great European powers. As governments prevaricated, the first

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

International Brigade fighters arrived in Spain answering the call from the republicans for help. Amongst the first to arrive were those Germans who, no longer able to fight against the Nazis in their homeland, now came to fight Fascists in Spain.

Although many trade unionists such as Jack Jones, later general secretary of the mighty Transport & General Workers Union (now Unite) did fight in Spain, the TUC and the Labour Party took a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the conflict adopting a policy of non-intervention. They supported neither the International Brigade nor the many calls for the government to supply arms. The TUC initially supported the Spanish Medical Aid Committee until political arguments brought that to an end. Individual unions and groups did raise money that was funnelled through to the Brigades, to local Spanish services and trade unions such as the Spanish General Workers Union, the UGT. The National Council of Labour, representing both the Labour Party and the TUC, did organise relief work and also worked with the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief to help Basque refugee children and those from Barcelona who were brought over to Great Britain after the bombing of Guernica and the fall of Barcelona.

A British Battalion was formed and was in operation by January 1937 fighting in the battle of Jarama. One company - the Major Attlee Company - was named after the Labour leader; and he and other Labour MPs visited the men at the front; future Indian prime minister Nehru and a future Conservative prime minister Edward Heath, also visited. Fiery red haired Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson, heroine of the hunger marches, wrote of meeting men from Durham and Wales on a hillside outside Madrid.

Money also came from The National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, chaired by the Conservative MP, the Duchess of Atholl, supplemented by local Aid Committees set up in most towns.

People flowed into Spain to fight. Men and women volunteers were

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

recruited. The first British person to die was a woman, Felicia Browne, an artist who had been in Barcelona when the rising started. A former student at the Slade, Browne, having taken part in anti-Fascist activities in Germany, arrived in Barcelona in time for the People's Olympiad which had been set up as a riposte to Hitler's Olympics. On 3 August she joined the PSUC (Catalan Communist) Karl Marx militia to fight on the Zaragoza front in Aragon. The *Daily Express* correspondent Sydney Smith quoted her as saying "I am a member of the London Communists and I can fight as well as any man". Browne was killed in action on 25 August 1936 when a raiding party she was a member of was ambushed as they tried to dynamite a Fascist munitions train. She was shot as she tried to pull a wounded comrade to safety.

Paris was the main mustering point for volunteers where they would be sent on a train in great secrecy down to the south and then across the border. Jack Shaw, so angered by what had happened at Cable Street, couldn't contemplate returning to work there after what had happened and joined the merchant navy, jumping ship in Alicante in March 1937. Determined to continue the fight, he made his way to Albacete in La Mancha, the headquarters of the International Brigade, where he met up with his old friends Charlie Goodman and Joe Garber who had taken the more accepted Paris route.

In September 1936, a military junta named Franco as the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces of Spain; taking control of the rebellious forces he wielded them into a strong disciplined block, a discipline that was missing amongst pro-government forces made up of people from different political ideologies. The following month, the first aid arrived from the USSR and in November Hitler and Mussolini recognised Franco as the head of the Spanish government.

In February 1937, the International Brigade played a major part in fighting off a nationalist offensive against Madrid; the defeat of Italian

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

volunteers at the Battle of Guadalajara led to Franco abandoning any attempt to take Madrid. In April, in the first example of what would eventually wreck many cities in Europe, the Germans bombed – blitzkrieg – the town of Guernica, an historical centre in the Basque region, causing widespread condemnation as hundreds were killed and the town destroyed. The artist Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica*, a homage to the people of the town, was displayed at the World Fair in 1937 in the republican government's gallery, where it would cause widespread shock. The Germans' rehearsal of tactics to be employed against Warsaw, Rotterdam and London proved to be a success. A month later Bilbao, strategic centre of the Basque area, fell to the nationalists. The war, seemingly a battle between the Catholics under Franco and the Communists, saw the ideological arguments intensify as the Vatican, ignoring the rule of law, threw its weight behind the generalissimo and recognised his unelected regime.

The war became increasingly savage as civilians were executed or killed during the fighting which spread to every area of Spain. There were few villages or towns untouched, and many personal disagreements were settled by firing squad. In 1938, as the country was cut in two by the nationalists, Franco called upon the republicans to surrender unconditionally. In July, following the hard fought Battle of Ebro, the republican army frequently riven with strife as anarchists, left wing groups and Communists argued, began to collapse, and in October the International Brigade left Spain.

1939 saw the civil war draw to an end as in January, Barcelona, faced by in-fighting amongst its defenders giving in to indiscipline, fell to Franco, leading the governments of Britain and France a month later to recognise the legitimacy of Franco's government. In March, Madrid finally surrendered to Franco. In April, the Spanish Civil War came to an end as republicans surrendered unconditionally to Franco. Leading members of

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

the Communist party fled to Moscow or to South America along with many who knew they faced execution if they remained. Many of the republicans who stayed were hunted down and executed or faced long sentences in prison. Spanish fighters who fled to France would eventually be sent to German concentration camps.

Franco would remain as the dictator of Spain, ruling the country with a grip of iron until his death in 1975, carrying out many human rights violations against any opposition; trade unions were banned, pensions forbidden to those crippled fighting the right. Shortly before his death Franco restored the monarchy under King Juan Carlos who led the transition back to democracy. A referendum was held which led to the establishment of a new constitution with a parliamentary democracy. Trade unions such as the UGT were allowed to operate and the Communist party was recognised. Many of its leaders who had fled to Moscow returned, one was Dolores Ibarruri Gomez. Jack Jones was to lead a TUC delegation to Spain in the late 1970s; survivors of the International Brigades would eventually be given honorary citizenships.

It was estimated that nearly half the fighters in the International Brigade was killed, wounded or taken prisoner; the British and the French were repatriated. But many, in particular the Germans and Austrians, were unable to return home and found themselves later, after France surrendered to the Germans, delivered to the German authorities by the French having been detained in camps in the south. Others joined the French resistance, and fought with the Maquis or with other resistance movements, many of them Communist.

The British returned home. In September 1939, the country went to war. Many of them, toughened by their experiences would take active roles in the defence of the country in the army or in civil defence; most would spend the rest of their lives fighting Fascism and against injustice.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

ON Sunday 3 September 1939 Britain and France declared war against Germany following its invasion of Poland two days earlier. The Second World War came almost as an anti-climax as Europe drifted towards a conflict whose seeds had been laid in the bitter discussions of the Versailles Treaty after the First World War. Appeasement had seen Germany march into the industrial Ruhr and the Saar, and the newly created Czechoslovakia dismembered and handed over to the Nazis. Out of the depths of economic depression and sanctions had emerged the Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany. The Spanish Civil War had been a rehearsal for the next world war.

As the Spanish Civil War ended, fighters returned – if they could – to their homelands to prepare for the next conflict. The Cable Street fighters came home to a country which welcomed the ‘peace in our time’ aspirations of its Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Many people, remembering the losses of the First World War still argued for peace, even at the cost of submission and alliances with those they despised. Although the country had welcomed the Jewish children on refugee trains and those who could fit the criteria which would allow them to stay in this country, public attitudes differed. The upper classes in particular felt an affinity towards Hitler who had quashed the Communist and socialist riots, and brought employment and stability. The left, the people of the East End, and in particular the Jews, had little doubt about what awaited them unless they fought the Nazis and the German dictatorship. They had argued against the imperialism of the First World War; but this was different, it was a war against totalitarianism and evil; they were ready to fight Fascism.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World was a global war lasting from 1939 to 1945 drawing in most of the world's countries into two distinct groups: the Axis, combining Germany, Italy and Japan, who signed a tripartite agreement in 1940 (joined subsequently by Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria); and the Allies, made up initially of France, Great Britain, supported by the Commonwealth and which represented countries such as Poland and Norway who had been invaded by the Axis. Later the USSR would join the Allies after it was invaded in June 1941; other countries such as the United States would enter the war on the Allied side after belligerent action was taken against them. More than 100 million people from over 30 countries in every continent would be involved. The Second World War saw the mass death of civilians and ended with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States of America. More people died in this war than in any other historical conflict. The First World War, with its huge loss of armed forces would remain the Great War, but this time losses amongst the civilian population would prove horrendous as whole communities, such as some six million Jews, would be wiped out. An estimated 50 to 85 million would die, and at least some 20 million of these were from the Soviet Union. Whereas the First World War was about imperialism, selling armaments and protecting old out-dated empires, this was a People's War against tyranny and subjugation.

The war in the far east had begun earlier with the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, but the war in the west began in 1939, after a series of trumped up accusations of Polish action against Germans in the Polish corridor to Danzig and supposed infringement of the borders, saw Germany launching a surprise attack on Poland on 1 September. France and Great Britain, allies of Poland, issued Germany with a warning that they would go to war with it unless Germany left Poland. Two days later the countries, for once, stood up to the Nazis and declared war on their old enemy.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Lessons learnt from the Spanish Civil War with the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, saw the swift evacuation of children from London to safety in the countryside. But whilst children were protected little was done by the two allies to go to the aid of Poland, which within weeks was dismembered as Soviet troops marched in to the east, and a new border was formed - The Brest Litovsk line. The Soviet Union had previously reached an agreement with Germany, 'The Molotov Ribbentrop Pact', which would see it annex eastern Poland and the Baltic States and invade Finland.

In France French troops, supported by the British, were deployed to wait out the time on the Maginot line, their seemingly impenetrable underground system of defence. Flowers were planted on it by bored troops, discipline was lax. The line had one fault and that was that it did not stretch along the whole of the French border. The Nazis would take full advantage of this weak point the following May when they broke all terms of neutrality and invaded the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium.

In Great Britain new regulations were brought in aimed at putting the country on a war footing. Hospitals were cleared, mortuaries were stacked up with cardboard coffins, the blackout was introduced, and people were given shovels, hard hats and gas masks; rationing became compulsory. Men were called up and women were drafted to take up their jobs. But with little happening children were brought home whilst people waited uneasily. Chamberlain himself, and members of his cabinet, still hoped that measures towards peace might be taken to stop a full scale war.

On 10 May 1940, after the ill-judged Norwegian campaign which had seen Germany take control of Norway and then Denmark, Winston Churchill, supported by Labour, became the Prime Minister. Labour leader Clement Attlee was appointed Deputy Prime Minister tasked with keeping the country running as Churchill dealt with war plans. The war was to be fought on two fronts by soldiers overseas and by civilians at home.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Ernest Bevin, the general secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union, was made Minister of Labour and National Service. This appointment was seen as being a way of deflecting labour problems as various regulations were enacted and working practices changed. The Emergency Powers Act and Defence Regulations gave the government enough power to control labour. A joint consultative committee of seven employers' representatives and seven trade unionists was established by Bevin to advise on running industry.

Despite this attempt to bring a smooth transition into how industry was to operate there were over 900 strikes at the beginning of the war, all illegal and all short. Action was not taken at that time as Bevin sought conciliation. Strike action was particularly prevalent in the coal mining industry, as men were drafted in to work in them. The Bevin Boys, whether they liked it or not, were conscripted as miners as mining was designated as essential war work. Later tougher action was taken by the TUC itself when in 1944, after over two thousand stoppages, it supported Defence Regulation 1AA which made incitement to strike illegal. In 1941 conscription for women had been introduced which saw them either working in the munitions or other designated industries or serving in the Land Army; little effort was made to help them, despite the fact that they often had to run two lives – looking after their homes and working long hours. New theories would be discussed on how to improve the country after the war. In 1942, the Beveridge Report, a summary of the principles necessary to banish poverty and 'want', was published.

But in 1940 the fall of France and the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk brought the country together as it turned on those who had advocated peace at any cost. The people of the United Kingdom supported by the Commonwealth and Allied troops, flyers and seamen who had escaped to fight, stood alone fighting off German air forces in the Battle of Britain. War came to the people as they were subjected to the blitz as

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

German planes rained down bombs on London and the other great cities; children were evacuated again. The war of 1914 to 1918 had been unpopular but this war was different as people came together to fight against an enemy which wanted to subjugate the country and wipe out many of its people. Reports had already been heard of German brutality to Jews, and more stories would emerge of German atrocities. Foreigners long settled in this country, along with refugees and those deemed to be trouble makers such as Mosley's Fascists and other nationalists, were rounded up and men were imprisoned in camps in places like the Isle of Man. Some were sent to Australia. Eventually most, barring the Fascists, would be freed, many taking up places in the armed forces.

Old class habits still persisted as the upper class were catered for with special air raid shelters, with little thought about introducing enough shelters for the general public. Phil Piratin, the Cable Street 'General', waged a campaign in the *Daily Worker* - soon to be banned - for more shelters and the opening of the underground tube system, culminating in a 'sit-in' at the Savoy hotel leading to the management opening up its shelter and providing a tea service. The opening of the underground system as a shelter for all the people saved the lives of many Londoners.

The invasion of the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarosa on 30 June 1941 changed the course of the war as Axis troops were committed to a war of attrition which would see quick results. German forces took prisoner whole armies of Soviet troops, but in turn their forces would be so stretched they would not be able to withstand the counter attacks from Soviet forces. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would welcome Germany as an ally, looking on the Nazis as their deliverers from former Soviet occupiers. Anti-semitism would be given free range in those countries as people turned on those they held responsible for all their grievances. Millions would die in Leningrad and Stalingrad as Hitler laid siege. The people of Great Britain worked to produce armaments and supplies for the Soviet

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Union; its merchant ships forming convoys to carry armaments, clothes and food through the treacherous seas to Russia. Thousands of merchant seamen died.

1941 saw the Nazis also successfully extend their campaign to other countries such as Greece, gradually pushing out British and allied armies; Rumania, with its much valued oil wells, fell to them. British forces held on to Egypt as they and German and Italian forces clashed time and again in the Middle East.

The Axis advance would be halted in 1942 as America entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Japan, a country run by a right wing group made up of aristocrats and generals fiercely opposed to democracy and ruled by an Emperor, successfully invaded much of the far east until it arrived on islands a few hours away from Australia. Gradually all the continents of the world had been drawn into the war. The turning point came with the American victory in the Battle of Midway when it defeated the Japanese navy in what would become one of the most crucial battles of the war. Germany was finally defeated in North Africa, freeing up allied forces to be deployed elsewhere. In the Soviet Union, the Germans were defeated at Stalingrad. The following year saw a series of German defeats on the Eastern Front. Allied troops invaded Sicily and Italy leading to the surrender of the Italians, and in the far east Allied troops fought back defeating Japan in several major battles waged over the islands.

1944 saw the war swing the way of the Allied forces in both the west and the east as in June they invaded German-occupied France and the Soviet Union regained all its territorial losses invading Germany itself and its allies, the Baltic countries, found themselves back under Soviet rule. As forces spread further into Europe they uncovered death and concentration camps where millions of Jews, Gipsies, Poles and Slavs had been exterminated, and millions had been forced to work, many to death. Millions of oppressed people had been sacrificed to help the German war

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

machine. People who failed to live up to the German genetic theories of a superior race were wiped out. In the far east, Japan was defeated on mainland Asia in South China and Burma; the Japanese navy was virtually wiped out as key Western Pacific islands were retaken. Horrific discoveries of the way that the Japanese had treated those who had fought against them were made.

The war in Europe would come to an end on 8 May 1945 with the unconditional surrender of Germany after the successful invasion of the country from the east by the USSR and from the west by the other allies, which culminated in the capture of Berlin by Soviet troops and the suicide of Hitler. But as the war in the west came to an end the war in the east continued with Japan refusing to surrender. On 6 August and 9 August nuclear bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered on 15 August.

The Second War itself officially came to an end on 2 September 1945, six years and one day after Germany invaded Poland. Whilst the last months of the war in the far east were still being fought, a British general election had taken place which had seen the people, and in particular the armed services, vote for a Labour government. The British were not going to make the same mistakes that they had made after the First World War; jobs and homes would be found for those dispossessed. The principles of the Beveridge Report, published in 1942, would heavily influence the founding of the Welfare State. A new fairer more just society beckoned which would see the introduction of the National Health system and the nationalisation of key industries such as coal.

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

AND THE

FIGHT AGAINST THEM

ON Friday 16 June 2016 Jo Cox, the bright young Labour MP for Batley and Spen, was murdered by Thomas Mair who was associated with the American based neo-Nazi organisation National Alliance. Yelling “Britain First” Mair stabbed and shot an MP trying to do her work, a stark, terrifying reminder of the depths that members of the far right will go to in furtherance of their dangerous, bigoted, racist and anti-semitic causes.

The Second World War should have seen the end of far right politics in this country, but instead it has continued under different names and guises; anti-semitism is still one of its main planks along with prejudice towards skin colour, added to recently by more extreme anti-Islamic racist connotations. As the make up of the population changes, the hatred of the far right has extended towards groups they consider as being different. And as has happened recently taken on a more sinister murderous tone. The first neo-Nazi group, Mosley’s British Union of Fascists, was banned in the Second World War and his attempts afterwards to resurrect both his career and party failed, with the party’s dwindling number of members joining other small Fascist groups; arguments that the Jews and Freemasons had won the war were preached to the few who would listen. But changes to the population, with the addition of austerity after the war, led to a fostering of ill feelings by those ‘little Englanders’ who resented new ideas and new cultures.

The arrival of the first Caribbean immigrants on the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, followed by those from India, Pakistan and Uganda, gave the far right the opportunity to find new groups of people to protest

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

against. In 1954, the League of Empire Loyalists was founded by A K Chesterton, with some support from Conservative groups. They were angered by changes to the Empire which they believed to be sacrosanct, as they saw countries gaining independence and becoming members of the Commonwealth. A pressure group more than a political party, it eventually splintered off into other parties, the main ones being the National Labour Party, and the White Defence League under Colin Jordan who stirred up trouble aggravating race relations in North Kensington where a large number of people from the West Indies had settled. Both parties stood candidates in the 1958 local elections and finally merged in 1960 to become the British National Party, with a paramilitary wing set up by Jordan and John Tyndall. The BNP bitterly opposed the admittance of 'foreign' people to the UK and staged a number of rallies; one held in Trafalgar Square ending up in a race riot. Attacks by right wing thugs on immigrants made streets through some areas dangerous for them to walk along. Bricks were thrown through the windows of immigrant homes; petrol was poured through letter boxes.

In 1967 remnants of the BNP, which had been destroyed by political in-fighting, joined the National Front; five years later John Tyndall (who in 1962, along with Jordan, had been convicted and imprisoned for paramilitary activities) became its leader. Further anti-immigration sentiments were stirred up by Conservative MP Enoch Powell on 20 April 1968 in Birmingham in his famous 'rivers of blood speech' when he warned the people of Britain of the dangers of increased immigration. Riots took place in the Midlands. In the 1976 Greater London Council elections, the NF polled 110,000 votes. Racism was prevalent at many football grounds, as was a growing anger amongst some areas of the population that wages were being held down and the welfare state was being cut back. Immigration began to be blamed for the country's woes by some workers, a belief that is still being propagated nowadays. Cable Street itself

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

was to become yet again the centre of further racist protests in the 1980s – this time from the far right as Fascists climbed the scaffolding and daubed the mural of the fight against Mosley with the words “British Nationalism not Communism – Rights for Whites – Stop the Race War”. Cable Street had seen its population change as new immigrants, some refugees, others seeking new lives, moved into the area. Fascist parties with new names were concentrating on stirring up ill feelings against the area’s new residents.

The National Front grew to become the biggest far right group in the country and was now winning votes, polling 44% in a local election in Deptford, London; coming third in three by-elections. Opposition nationally to the far right had been led by the trade unions and the Labour party, who in the mid-70s ran a campaign ‘United Against Racism’ which saw trade unionists called upon to defeat the NF and racism at work and in the community. Miners were very much to the fore in defending their fellow trade unionists when a TUC/Labour march against racism in Manchester in 1975 was attacked by the National Front. Much of the opposition against the far right would come from the Anti Nazi League set up in 1977, supported by trade unions, the Indian Workers’ Association and various MPs. It took a more populist approach to racism by holding marches and rock concerts and carnivals, such as the one held in the East End as a response to rising racism in the area. It was to lead the way in spreading anti-Fascism until 1981, when the National Front itself collapsed. Many groups locally and nationally came together after the battle of Lewisham to protest and fight against racism.

Cable Street had marked one of the biggest protests against Mosley’s Fascists; Lewisham in August 1977 marked a turning point in the fight against Fascism in the 1970s. Concentrating in the mid-70s on New Cross in south London, the National Front and the National party polled more votes between them in a local ward election to the Lewisham Borough Council than the Labour party. The All Lewisham Campaign Against

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

Racism and Fascism, with the support of local trade unions and anti-racist and anti-Fascist groups, was founded to take them on. There had been problems in the area for some time with police carrying out a series of raids on young black people accused of mugging; relationships within the community were breaking down and anger against the authorities was heightened by what was described as high-handed police action. On Saturday 13 August 1977, 500 members of the National Front, claiming that a multi-racial society was wrong, attempted to march from New Cross to Lewisham. Counter demonstrations of some 4,000 people, supported by thousands of local people, led to violent clashes, not only between the two groups but also between the anti-Fascist demonstrators and police. The National Front retreated from the area, holding a short meeting in a local car park having been blocked from reaching the town's centre. The battle between the police and demonstrators saw the police using riot shields for the first time on the English mainland as horses and baton charges weighed into the anti-Nazi demonstrators. By the end of the day 111 people had been injured and up to 214 people had been arrested. The fact that the racists had been stopped at Lewisham gave a new impetus to people in other areas where the National Front had been making inroads, such as in Brick Lane in the East End, to resist them.

The battle for Lewisham was preceded by another on 23 April in Wood Green when a National Front march of some 1,200 people was opposed by 3,000 anti-racist protestors including members of Haringey Labour party, trade unionists, Communists, Indian Workers' Association, local West Indians and members of other anti-racist groups, including local clergymen. Gathering on Duckett's Common as people listened to speeches, a contingent of more radical protestors broke away and attacked the NF column with smoke bombs, eggs and rotten vegetables. 81 people were arrested, including 74 anti-Fascists. The two battles at Wood Green and Lewisham were to have seismic effects upon attitudes as to how the NF

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

were to be opposed with the founding of groups such as the Anti Nazi League. Politically the NF would become marginalised.

There has been extreme violence perpetrated by the far right, not only recently with the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox. On 4 May 1978 a 25 year old Bangladeshi textile worker Altab Ali was murdered by three teenagers in a racist attack as he walked home after work in the East End. It was the night of local borough elections and the National Front had been agitating in the area. A garment worker in a sweat shop in Brick Lane, Altab Ali was on his way home when he was chased along the lane and stabbed to death near Aldgate Station. When asked why he did it, one of the teenagers said it was for “no reason” at all: “If we saw a Paki we used to have a go at them. We would ask for money and beat them up. I’ve beaten up Pakis on at least five occasions.”

On 14 May 7,000 people took part in a demonstration against racial violence; it was described at the time as being one of the biggest demonstrations by Asians ever seen in Britain. A mass mobilisation of the Bengali community locally saw the self-organisation of that community, with many young Bangladeshis, following the example of previous Jewish and Irish communities, becoming involved in political activity. At the time the National Front had been politically on the rise in the East End, standing for election in 43 council seats. The outrage about what had happened led to them eventually being pushed out of Whitechapel. The right of Bangladeshis to live in the area as a viable, vibrant community was established. St Mary’s churchyard in which Altab Ali was murdered is now a park named after him.

Although people were hurt fighting Mosley and the Fascists, no one was actually killed during those protests. But in April 1979, an Anti Nazi League member, Blair Peach, was killed following a demonstration in Southall against a National Front election meeting. He was seriously injured following a clash with police and collapsed and later died in

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

hospital. A member of the police Special Patrol Group was accused of using an unauthorised weapon. An inquest jury returned a verdict of misadventure, no police officer has ever been charged or prosecuted for his death, though an internal police inquiry report at that time, which wasn't published for another 30 years, stated that he had been killed by an unidentifiable police officer.

By the end of the 1970s the National Front split; as a political force it failed to make an impression nationally as a more inclusionist vision of the UK caught on. The murder of Altab Ali also had a profound effect upon how the party was viewed. A new far right party, the British National Party, was founded in 1982 to fight membership of the European Union, mainly on the basis of immigration and what they described as "erosion of British life". In 1990 Nick Griffin became its leader and by 2000 they were winning a number of council seats. Under Griffin the party picked up two seats in the June 2009 European Parliamentary elections, the previous year they had won a record 100 council seats as well as a seat on the Greater London Assembly. Anti Fascist Action, a national anti-Fascist group, took up the fight against the BNP holding a series of events in the East End which encouraged other left wing groups to launch anti-racist and anti-Fascist groups. The Anti Nazi League, which had played such an important part in the fight against the NF, had been wound up when the NF collapsed and was resurrected in the 1990s, and in 2002 would work with Love Music Hate Racism, using the same populist methods as it had done previously, to get the message against racism over.

In 2010 the BNP won 563,743 votes, but no parliamentary seats. They had made inroads in some areas winning 58 council seats out of a total of 22,000. The BNP had won its first council seat in Tower Hamlets in 1993, and had stood unsuccessfully for seats in Lewisham. In Newham it had two councillors and 12 in Barking and Dagenham but subsequently fell back into obscurity losing these seats after a concerted campaign against

FAR RIGHT POLITICS

them led by local politicians supported by trade unions and anti-Nazi groups. A new anti-Islamist group, the English Defence League, started to become more popular as Fascists switched from preaching hard racism to appealing to national sentiments on a cultural basis, yet again an ‘alien group’ had to be blamed for ill-conceived fears, some fanned by papers pushing their own political agendas, mostly based on anti-European propaganda. Protesting against what they describe as the Islamification of Britain, the EDL holds demonstrations in towns and cities, the largest one in Luton in 2011. Other far right groups, campaigning against immigration, multiculturalism and Islamisation of the country, have been formed, some making alliances with far right groups in Europe; mosques, synagogues and Jewish gravestones have been desecrated, people beaten up and threatened. In December 2016, the British nationalist party, National Action, was proscribed as a terrorist organisation – becoming the first right group to be banned in the UK since Mosley’s BUF – for celebrating the murder of Jo Cox. Members of the organisation took part in religiously motivated attacks on Twitter against the Jewish Labour MP Luciana Berger; a member was convicted of attempted murder in revenge for that of soldier Lee Rigby.

Antifa and groups such as Unite Against Fascism, into which the ANL merged, and Searchlight (a magazine that has long fought Fascism under its editor Gerry Gable) and Hope Not Hate have continued to fight against the far right, raising people’s consciousness and awareness of the danger of Fascism, and have stopped the plans of the far right groups to whip up prejudice or to win seats in elections. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for all forms of anti-Islamist and anti-semitism to be fought and defeated. In October 2016 he spoke at an anniversary rally for Cable Street and reminded people of what had been achieved by the local people in the 1930s and pledged opposition to any form of fascism and racism.

ANTI-SEMITISM

ANTI-SEMITISM, preached by Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts, was repulsed at Cable Street by Communists, socialists, trade unionists, the Irish and Jews. The people of the East End, supported by the thousands who flocked into the area, united to protect their neighbours and to stop Mosley marching through Stepney and peddling his hatred of the Jews.

Anti-semitism has often lain behind a very thin veneer of civilisation; though there has never been the savagery of pogroms killing Jews in England as there was on mainland Europe during the last few centuries, there have been anti-semitic actions in Wales and England - mainly aimed at damaging Jewish businesses and property and at defiling their synagogues and their graves.

Jews arrived in England just a few years after the Norman conquest, with the first settlement being recorded in 1070. Racial discrimination grew stronger with allegations, known as the 'blood libel', accusing Jews of ritual murder, which led to massacres - one of which took place in York. Here 150 Jews took their own lives rather than be burnt to death in Clifford's Tower. Jews were continually discriminated against, being made to wear the colour yellow, a portent of what would happen during the Nazis' rule of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, and to live in designated areas. Only limited professions, mainly usury, were open to them. In 1290 Edward I expelled them from England in an Edict. Some remained, hiding their religion, living outwardly as Christians. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* was written at the same time that it was still illegal to be Jewish. Elizabeth I was looked after by a baptised Jewish doctor who was subsequently hanged, drawn and quartered.

Jews were readmitted to the United Kingdom by Oliver Cromwell in 1655, after an appeal from a Dutch Rabbi. Cromwell also needed money

ANTI-SEMITISM

to help fund the rebuilding of the country after the civil war and to pay for the war in Ireland. The Dutch Jews, descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal, settled in London with a synagogue in Creechurch near Aldgate.

In the following centuries they were regularly subjected to discrimination and humiliation. They became more settled, and their contributions to the community and country, both commercial and philanthropic, and their sporting achievements as well as their literature and art, were recognised. They gradually wore down much of the prejudice over the years. They were accepted to a certain extent by a society which welcomed their contributions. Disraeli, born a Jew but baptised as a Protestant, became one of Queen Victoria's favourite Prime Ministers.

A mass wave of two million Jewish immigrants, many of them poor, arrived in the UK from 1881 as a result of the Russian pogroms and increase in persecution in Europe. They sought safety and less poverty-stricken lives. Many of the refugees travelled onwards to America although others stayed, some because they wanted to settle in the UK, others because they couldn't afford the boat fares, settling in all the port areas; some moved to the big cities where they might be able to find work.

Most of them were Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish speakers from Eastern Europe. Those arriving through the Port of London stayed there and settled in the Spitalfields, Stepney and Whitechapel areas of the East End of London, outnumbering the established Sephardic and Dutch Jews. Claiming to be overwhelmed by the numbers coming in, the government passed the Aliens Act in 1905, the first such legislation to restrict immigration.

In the Jewish East End there was chronic overcrowding with insanitary conditions and poverty. Sweatshops, usually based on the rag trade and cigarette manufacture, were common. The Jewish community set up its own welfare and education systems to help. Many Jews became

ANTI-SEMITISM

highly politicised and unionised – Phil Piratin was one such young Jew, who would eventually become MP for the area – bringing the Jewish community together with other East Enders rebelling at the conditions of deprivation. Though local people complained about the new influx of people into their area, there was no open hostility as such, none of the pogroms or expression of bitterness as there had been in other countries. The one exception was in Wales where many Jews had emigrated to work in the industrialised south; in 1911 working class mobs in Tredegar attacked Jewish owned businesses causing thousands of pounds worth of damage.

The largest community of Jews remained in the East End of London and became a target in the 1930s for the anti-immigration policies of Oswald Mosley, and for some of the establishment who believed that their ‘British’ way of life would be tainted by these ‘foreign’ eastern immigrants. Mosley’s attempts at intimidation were defeated by the people of the East End, as Jews, Communists, socialists and the Irish united to stop him from marching through their area.

The aftermath of war and details of the holocaust turned British society against racial hatred of the Jews; displays of anti-semitism became unacceptable in most areas, but there were still outbursts of hatred from far right groups, most of it based on cultural hatred rather than on religious grounds. Jewish ex-servicemen formed their own 43 Group which broke up Fascist meetings. Football culture has also seen anti-semitism with Tottenham Hotspur, long associated with the Jewish communities in North London, being singled out for attacks on its ‘yid army’ of supporters – not only on the pitch but also outside the grounds.

Holocaust denial – often paired with Jewish conspiracy theories – was deemed as against the law in many countries. British ‘historian’ David Irving produced academic theories to prove that the holocaust never happened. He became one of the greatest perpetrators of the argument that millions had not been deliberately gassed. His role as an historian was

ANTI-SEMITISM

destroyed in 1996 when he lost a libel case he had filed against the American historian Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books as he was shown to have deliberately misrepresented historical evidence to try and prove that Jews had not been murdered at Auschwitz.

The main thrust of anti-semitism still comes from the far right but there has also been a more contemporary form that has come from other groups, some from the left and far left concerned at the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel, the occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, and the building of settlements on land deemed as originally belonging to Palestinians as reflected in Israel's foreign policy towards Arabs and Palestinians. The far right has used Israel repeatedly to raise questions as to Jewish loyalty to Britain. Anti-semitism has in some cases become merged with anti-Zionism, as a result of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Anger at the way that Palestinians have been treated by Israel, especially with the occupation of the West Bank, has raised antagonism amongst the British Muslim community, and others sympathetic to them, this has strayed into actions taken against British Jews, some of whom have themselves been highly critical of Israeli actions against Palestinians.

In 2005, an all party parliamentary inquiry found that "until recently, the prevailing opinion both within the Jewish community and beyond had been that it [anti-semitism] had reduced to the point that it existed only in the margins of society".

But with anti-semitism being tied to criticism of Israel and with the increased use of social media there has since then been a marked rise in anti-semitism. Old accusations based on conspiracy theories reflected in the long discredited *Protocols of Zion*, published in Russia in 1903 claiming that Jews were planning a world-wide take over, have resurfaced as anti-semites fall back on old theories. Twitter, one of the leading social media platforms, has allowed publication of what can only be described as Fascist dogma attacking Jews, and in particular Jewish financiers.

ANTI-SEMITISM

In 2014 the Department of Communities and Local Government published a report that showed there had been a 25% increase in anti-semitic incidents in social media; the previous year there had been a dip in such incidents. Areas which had seen a rise in incidents, such as physical attacks, desecrations of graves and synagogues and shops were identified as coming under three main police forces: Metropolitan, Greater Manchester and Hertfordshire, and covered the areas where the majority of Jews live. Some of the dates of incidents – but not all – coincided with problems in the Middle East. A new government inquiry report published in 2015 made recommendations for reducing anti-semitism. The same year the Community Security Trust, formed in 1994 by some who had fought at Cable Street, published a report which stated that there had been a significant increase in anti-semitic incidents during 2014 which had seen the number more than double compared to the previous year, reaching 1,168 hate crimes. The conflict in Israel and in Gaza was described by the CST as being the largest contributing factor, with the highest ever monthly total of incidents recorded in July 2014 which coincided with one of the Israeli actions. Figures published since then by the CST have shown that the number of incidents has been steadily rising.

A survey carried out by The Campaign Against Anti-semitism and published in 2016 found that 45% of British Jews feared that they might not have any future in Britain, 77% had viewed political comment on Israel as thinly disguised anti-semitism and 25% of British Jews had considered leaving the country in the two years beforehand because of anti-semitism. In 2016 a Home Affairs Select Committee held an inquiry into anti-semitism in the UK. Its report, made after listening to party leaders, was critical of the three main political parties, the National Union of Students, Twitter and the police for exacerbating or failing to deal with anti-semitism. The Labour party, which was severely criticised by its own internal Jewish movement has carried out a report on anti-semitism within its midst and

ANTI-SEMITISM

has promised to tackle it wherever it is found; members have been suspended or expelled.

Trade unions and political parties have condemned anti-semitism and have sought to separate attitudes towards Jews from those held against Israel. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, speaking at the Cable Street memorial rally in October 2016, expressed his disdain for anti-semitism and declared that he would fight it.

On 26 September 2017 the Labour conference introduced a significant rule change outlawing any form of racism and anti-semitism. Welcoming the change Corbyn said “Anyone using anti-semitic language, anyone using any form of racist language, is completely at odds with the beliefs of the party”.

In 2017, despite the increase in attacks, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research conducting what it described as being the ‘largest and most detailed survey of attitudes towards the Jews and Israel ever conducted in Great Britain’ found that the levels of anti-semitism in Great Britain were among the lowest in the world, with 2.4% expressing multiple anti-semitic attitudes, and with 70% having a favourable attitude towards Jews. It also found that 33% held attitudes against Israel, with only 17% having a favourable attitude.

The Battle of Cable Street was a turning point in waking people up to the affects of anti-semitism and rallying opposition in the 1930s; the Fascists were defeated but it is still evident that racism in this country still exists either in the form of anti-semitism, or nowadays in the form of anti-Islamism, and the arguments against such prejudice were again expressed eloquently by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn at the Cable Street rally in 2016: “To those who daub synagogues with anti-semitic graffiti or defile mosques with anti-Islamic hate or any other communities that suffer abuse or racism, we are here on the side of those communities who suffer xenophobia or any form of racial abuse, to defend all these communities and the multi-racial society that we want to live in.”

Written by PETA STEEL

Published in November 2017 by SERTUC
Congress House, Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS
020 7467 1220 sertuc@tuc.org.uk

TUC London, East
& South East

Printed by Upstream
020 7358 1344 cooperative@upstream.coop

£2