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# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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# FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM



# HOW JEWS IN BRITAIN COUNTERED THE THREATS OF THE 1930S

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by David Rosenberg

JCARP Publications

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# **FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM**

## **HOW JEWS IN BRITAIN COUNTERED THE THREATS OF THE 1930S**

**by David Rosenberg**

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The Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP) has been launched by the Jewish Socialists' Group on the basis of a grant from the GLC Ethnic Minorities Committee. The project has been designed to make a substantial and sustained contribution to achieving three principal objectives, all of major significance to the Jewish community and other ethnic minority communities in this country:

- ★ to make Jews more conscious of their position as members of an ethnic minority group with needs and aspirations on a par with other minority groups;
- ★ to draw on the immigrant experience and radical and anti-racist history of the Jewish community in order more forcefully to challenge antisemitism and racism today;
- ★ to develop and promote secular Jewish culture in the context of building a society enriched by cultural diversity.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BoD Board of Deputies

BUF British Union of Fascists

IFL Imperial Fascist League

JC Jewish Chronicle

JPC Jewish People's Council

NCCL National Council for Civil  
Liberties

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# Foreword

The enormity of the tragedy that befell the Jews of Germany and the Nazi-occupied countries in the thirties and forties has understandably tended to eclipse the problems faced by Jewish communities elsewhere during the same period. Yet antisemitism and organised antisemitic movements were by no means confined to Germany and its allies, nor indeed to Central and Eastern Europe. Here in Britain, for example, the years leading up to the Second World War saw the Jewish community subjected to an organised political and physical onslaught that revealed widespread acceptance of antisemitic ideology throughout British society. While the main force behind this attack, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, declined sharply from 1937 onwards as the threat of war with Germany increased, the vicious antisemitism for which it had provided an organisational focus did not fade. The years 1938-9 witnessed a vigorous campaign of anti-Jewish agitation, the so-called 'alien scare'.

David Rosenberg's detailed account of the antisemitic movement in the thirties is a timely reminder that organised antisemitism is no stranger to the British political scene. Equally important, however, is his revealing analysis of the responses of the Jewish community under attack. For what emerges is a picture of a community divided.

The official leadership of the community, the Board of Deputies, tried initially to play down the extent of antisemitic agitation and to label antisemitism an alien implant that could not take root on a British soil fertilised by British moderation and 'fair play'. When antisemitism refused to go away, the Jewish establishment counselled the community to keep a low profile. It went so far as to warn against giving substance to antisemitic accusations by unwarranted ostentation. To counter the threat, it relied on a campaign of refuting antisemitic allegations by reasoned argument. Above all, it called on British Jews not to get involved in anti-fascist political campaigns and to remain aloof from 'extremist' groups. In its view, the Jews had no quarrel with fascism as such, and should avoid taking sides with one party against another in British politics.

This response was insufficient to dispel the fears of ordinary Jews in working class areas who were unable to 'keep away from trouble' when the bricks were flying through their windows,



and many of whom clearly perceived the political nature of the threat to the Jews in Britain. Grass-roots organisations were set up which challenged the Board of Deputies' hegemony and called on Jews to participate in the fight against fascism alongside other anti-fascist organisations. The most successful of these independent Jewish groups, the Jewish People's Council, won the allegiance of the great majority of ordinary Jews in the East End of London. The high point of the JPC's campaign was the successful opposition to the fascist march through the East End which has come to be known as the 'Battle of Cable Street'. Inspired by the determined struggle of the anti-fascists in Spain, thousands of East End Jews defied the injunctions of the Board of Deputies and the Jewish establishment and stood shoulder to shoulder with the Irish workers of Limehouse under the slogan 'They shall not pass!'.

The attitude of the Board of Deputies in the thirties is, however, not merely of historical interest. For an organisation like the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project, the 'low-profile' of the Board is depressingly familiar. In Britain today, in a climate of widespread racism and racist violence, mainly directly against the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities but of which the Jews are also a major target, the Board continues to pursue its 'softly, softly' and 'leave it to us' tactics. With the revival of organised fascist groups in the sixties and seventies, the Board consistently shunned cooperation with board-based anti-fascist campaigns. Its' hostility to the Anti-Nazi League in the late seventies is a notorious example.

The Board continues to warn Jews against associating with 'extremists' and to assure them that everything is being taken care of. Consistent with this approach, it carefully vets the information about antisemitic attacks at its disposal and ensures that the full extent of antisemitic violence is kept hidden from the Jewish and general public. It continues to vilify organisations like JCARP and its parent body, the Jewish Socialists' Group, which sees Jews in Britain in the 1980s as an ethnic minority whose interests can be effectively defended only through combined anti-racist struggle alongside other ethnic minorities and threatened sectors of society. Above all, the Board of Deputies today, as in the thirties, resents any independent initiative within the Jewish community that it cannot control.

In publishing David Rosenberg's account of Jewish communal responses to antisemitism in the 1930s, we invite the Jewish and general public to reflect on these parallels.

Barry Smerin  
Chairperson, JCARP.

## Introduction

In May 1932, a Leeds synagogue was vandalized. The attack was interpreted at the time as an 'isolated and indeed unique event' by the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC) which, it confidently assured its readers, 'will be deplored by the vast majority of non-Jews'. Antisemitism was considered a feature of the Continent that barely existed in meaningful form in Britain. The fact that for generations Jews in Britain apparently had 'so little experience of it (consisting of) only feeble and casual manifestations of Jew-hatred' was seen as the reason for the incredulity with which they treated reported instances of violent antisemitism emerging particularly from Germany and Poland among other European nations. Three years later, in spite of the fact that incidents similar to that in Leeds had occurred in other major cities in Britain, and that attacks on Jewish property had often been accompanied by defamation of and assaults upon Jewish people, the JC nevertheless reassured its readers: 'Race hatred is a weed which fortunately it is difficult to plant in British soil'.

This statement was not consistent with facts which testified to the existence of a widespread and intensifying antisemitic campaign in Britain, pursued through a variety of channels. Its central propagator was a political party called the British Union of Fascists (BUF) formed in 1932. It claimed a mass membership, and sought power on a social, economic and political programme which from 1934 contained antisemitism as its central plank. Neither was it consistent with the anxieties and awareness of a very real danger, expressed by increasing numbers of Jews, particularly in the areas of East London, Leeds, Lancashire and South Wales where the campaign was most pronounced. The Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD), which had formed the established leadership of the community since 1760, was at this stage satisfied that the educational and anti-defamation work performed by its Central Lecture Committee and its Press and Information Committee respectively, provided an adequate response to antisemitic calumny as and when necessary. But the wider community was convinced otherwise. It demanded that the BoD set up an independent body to lead a vigorous, intensive and wide ranging campaign against antisemitism, and furthermore gave warning that 'if the so-called leaders of Jewry do not take the lead, there are Jewish men and women who will.' So serious was the situation in East London that a special parliamentary debate on antisemitic terror was called in July 1936 at which

local MP George Lansbury declared, 'unless this thing is put an end to — I have known East London all my life — there will one of these days be such an outburst as few of us would care to contemplate', whilst Pritt (MP, Hammersmith) feared that if the government did not act there would be 'pogroms in this country'. Pogrom — the Russian word associated with Continental antisemitism — was now being applied to antisemitism in Britain. Roused to the realities of the situation and aware of increasingly strident demands within the community for more tangible defence measures, the BoD established an independent Co-ordinating Committee to unify and direct defence work for the community. As they were apparently so slow to acknowledge the nature and extent of the antisemitic threat, significant sections in the Jewish community were unwilling to place their confidence and reliance in the BoD and its responses. In the period until 1939, a number of independent initiatives arose within the community. The most significant and embracing alternative was embodied in an organisation called the Jewish People's Council (JPC). They did not share the communal leadership's particular understanding of the nature of antisemitism in Britain and therefore developed a distinct analysis and set of responses, which posed an effective challenge to the hegemony of the established leadership on this issue. The acute nature of the ongoing defence debate attested to a divided community. This contradicted the view shared both by antisemites and many among the Jewish communal leadership that Anglo-Jewry in the 1930s was an homogeneous corporate unit.

## The Jewish presence

A popular weapon in the armoury of the antisemites in the 1930s, seeking political support among the poorer and distressed areas of Britain, was the assertion of an alleged co-existence of three million unemployed and three million Jews in Britain. This enabled a simple equation to be used in order to blame the Jews for causing unemployment. The farcical nature of the equation, which rested upon no factual basis, was complemented by a considerable over-estimation of the size of the Jewish population. The number of Jews residing in Britain in the 1930s was around 330,000 out of a total population of 45 million, yet the assertions of the antisemites were in no way hindered by the failure of the Jewish community to provide accurate statistics of its size. The Jews were, in the words of a regular JC columnist, 'a community under attack, but a community unarmed'. In further articles he declared that there was

'a crying need for a scientific study of Anglo-Jewish conditions. For many years some among us have called insistently at least for statistical enquiry, but this call has fallen on the deaf ears of a community which shuns figures like a pest and fails to understand their importance.'<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of such statistical information as was collected, it was estimated that of the 330,000 Jews in England, more than two-thirds were confined to three major population centres: 183,000 in London, 35,000 in Manchester, and 30,000 in Leeds. The figures for London were further enumerated by Nettie Adler (in the 'New Survey of London Life and Labour') who estimated that 60% of London's Jews lived in East London and 52% of the latter lived in the Borough of Stepney.

The tendency to view the community as homogeneous was a characteristic error of antisemites, but one which was shared by many Jews. Historically, the Jewish community in Britain had been comprised principally of Dutch and Italian Jews of Spanish descent who had settled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and those of German descent who settled in the early Victorian era. Additionally there was a growing trickle from Eastern Europe. Many of nineteenth century English Jewry were in banking, stock brokerage, mercantile transactions, the tailoring and tobacco trades; fewer in the arts, sciences and professions. During the nineteenth century there was also an influx of poorer Jews from Holland and



Northern Germany who were often tradesmen and country pedlars. The majority of nineteenth century Anglo-Jewry were generally very anglicised and assimilated and confined in the main to the upper-middle class. Nevertheless, the setting up of a Board of Guardians for the relief of Jewish poor in 1859 testified to the existence of considerable numbers of less affluent Jews. By the 1930s, although the economically dominant Jews of Dutch and German descent still held most of the leading positions within the community, they were numerically a minority, having been surpassed by the mass influx of Jews fleeing antisemitic oppression in Eastern Europe, and their children who had been brought up in Britain. Indeed the latter's experience of antisemitism was not confined to Eastern Europe, for they were the target of a virulent anti-alien campaign in Britain at the turn of the century, which culminated in the Aliens Act of 1905 restricting the entry of many Jews into Britain. Journalist and author William Zukerman described them as:

'sufficiently different in appearance, language, mode of life and thought from the surrounding native majority to act as a psychological irritant to a people not used to foreigners.'<sup>2</sup>

It is instructive to recall the attitude of the Jewish communal leaders to their incoming co-religionists during the mass immigration from Eastern Europe. The dominant view shared by Anglo-Jewry's leading families, the Rothschilds, Montefiores and Moccatas, was that immigrants should be allowed free entry but Anglo-Jewry ought not to encourage them. Effectively, as little aid as possible was given to the aliens and repatriation and emigration to America was encouraged and assisted. A less powerful view, though energetically canvassed, was associated mainly with Samuel Montagu, the MP for Whitechapel, not proposing an open welcome but offering more humane treatment from the time of landing. A third view actually demanded restriction; ashamed of incoming Jews whom it was thought would provoke antisemitism.

After the first World War the composition of the communal leadership began to change, for there rose among Jewry the older East European immigrant and nationalist Jew who had waged a successful battle for recognition, achieved a satisfactory social position, and found a place in Jewish representative institutions. But the largest single group among Anglo-Jewry in the 1930s was that of second generation immigrants, composed in the main of workers and poor traders who grew up in the midst of the English working classes. They were mostly concentrated in



*A typical street scene in the Jewish East End, Whitechapel, 1935*

light industry and the distributive trades, especially boot and shoe, clothing and cabinet-making. They were generally identified as being neither religious, nor nationalistic and as possessing a distinctly different outlook from the Jewish upper and middle class. This 'new community' often collectively characterised as 'Jewish labour and Jewish youth' was perceived as being largely divorced from the synagogue, uninterested in Jewish affairs, and basically sharing the outlook and culture of its social environment. Zukerman argued that there was

'so much in common between the young post-war English Cockney and the young East End Jew . . . (that) . . . what goes under the name of the East End Jew is in reality no specific Jewish type at all, but a general East London labour type'.<sup>3</sup>

But perhaps Zukerman overstates the case. The class nature of



East End Jews was complex. Whilst the vast majority were engaged in proletarian occupations, a significant minority were owners of small enterprises. Another significant minority were entering the professions, which provided a source of much disquiet in the community. Was 'crowding' the professions in the interest of the Jewish people or might it lend credence to the slur that Jews were engaged in non-productive labour? The JC reported an instance in 1933 of a fight between fascists and Jews. The occupations of the four Jews concerned verified this class complexity. The four comprised a butcher, a salesman, a traveller and an accountant. Although the 'new community' was less attached than its predecessors to religion, it nevertheless underwent an extensive process of Jewish identification through childhood Hebrew and religion classes, adolescent youth clubs, societies and associations, occupational concentration, ghetto housing and the use of Yiddish language.

Towards the end of the 1930s there was a further influx of Jewish immigrants, though on a much smaller scale. Approximately 11,000 Austrian and German Jews fleeing Nazism settled in Britain. Their assessment by the communal leaders was more generous. The President of the BoD, Neville Laski, affirmed:

'The greater part of these people are not as were so many of the refugees of the 'eighties and 'nineties, ignorant and uncultured many without a trade and speaking no language save Yiddish. The vast majority of the sufferers today are of a class which would be an asset to any country into which they were admitted. They are cultured, they speak more than one language, many of them are big industrialists and businessmen . . . Among the immigrants today are many men of high professional attainments.'<sup>4</sup>

The Jewish community was extremely heterogeneous in its social, economic and cultural composition. This had profound implications for the understanding of and confrontation with antisemitism by different elements in the community. Communal diversity was not reflected in the established institutions of the community, which later sought to command the unified support of the community against organized antisemitism.

### The Board of Deputies

'Unless we know ourselves, we cannot explain ourselves to others.'<sup>5</sup>

In 1760, the London Committee of Deputies of British Jews was set up as the instrument of the community in its struggle for the acquisition of civil and political rights. It was later re-

named the Board of Deputies and emerged as the 'representative' institution of Anglo-Jewry. Indeed its representative and authoritative character is recognised by the government which in several statutes calls upon the President of the Board, or the Board as a body, to carry out special tasks in the implementation of parliamentary legislation. It has had as its object the care of all external matters affecting the welfare of Anglo-Jewry.

Its 'representation' of the community has been limited, for it has always been predominantly synagogue-based and has therefore represented Jews almost exclusively as a religious minority. In 1938, it had 355 members representing 92 London synagogues, 127 provincial, 10 colonial and 15 lay institutions having specified Jewish interests. It embodied a particular conception of the Jewish community in which its defining and single distinguishing characteristic was religious. This coincided with the historical model of an anglicised, assimilationist Jewry but it became increasingly inapplicable with the growth of the 'new community'. By the 1930s, this incongruity had magnified. Jewish labour and Jewish youth, whose relations with the BoD were nebulous, were awakened by the presence of organised antisemitism to the crisis of Anglo-Jewry; a body of which they were increasingly conscious of forming a significant part. Voices in the community expressed a widespread discontent with the BoD. It was claimed that large sections of Jews, in particular secular Jews who were members of Jewish or predominantly Jewish trade unions, effectively lacked the franchise. One correspondent to the JC wrote:

'the growth of antisemitism in this country requires an overhauling of our communal machinery. The present Board of Deputies no longer represents the Anglo-Jewish community. It is out of touch with the rank and file'.<sup>6</sup>

Another claimed that the business of the Board was conducted in a high handed and undemocratic manner and that it was 'an unrepresentative and undemocratic institution which had no mandate on any specific issue'.

Representation by Jewish trade unions was viewed by the BoD as adding a definite political element to a body that was decidedly and avowedly non-political, and the increasing representation of non-religious Jewish workers through institutions such as Friendly Societies was seen as raising the danger of secularisation. Member of the BoD, Bertram Jacobs, maintained, 'The BoD is far from perfect but I would remind those who criticized it that the community created institutions in its own image'. By the 1930s, this no longer met the case. Elsewhere, Anglo-Jewry

was continuing to assert its presence in the wider British society. Since 1858 it was legal for Jews to sit in Parliament and in 1936 there were 18 Jewish Members: 8 Conservatives, 6 Labour and 4 Liberals. Additionally there were 7 Jewish peers and 5 Privy Councillors. Significantly none of the Jewish MPs sat in a constituency with a large Jewish vote.

### The Jewish Chronicle

The Jewish Chronicle was established in 1841 and has, through its subtitle, consistently claimed to be 'the organ of British Jewry'. This weekly newspaper has always been privately owned, not formally representing any particular section of the community. However an examination of its editorial policy and general content reveals that it lies broadly within the consensus of opinion of the established communal leadership. In the 1930s there existed a number of Yiddish newspapers which were popular among the older generation of working-class Jews, and a small number of provincial papers, but the JC could offer the largest and most comprehensive coverage and claim the most broadly encompassing readership. It was obtainable in most areas of Jewish concentration and also serviced overseas Jewish communities, and by the 1930s had achieved a considerable international reputation. An analysis of the defence debate that ensued, particularly in 1936, in its letter columns, substantiates its claim to have been widely read among most sections of the community.

Its format remained constant throughout the period subject to minor modifications. Usually between fifty and sixty pages in length, its principal regular features included the Editorial, Jewry Week by Week, Imperial and Foreign News, Land of Israel News, The Palestine Movement, Provincial News, News Items, and Correspondence. In addition, two 'special' features appeared weekly: In the Communal Armchair — by 'Watchman' — and The Letters of 'Benammi', the first of which presented an often controversial review of mainly secular internal communal affairs, whilst the latter related current affairs to religious teachings. 'In the Communal Armchair' explored several key issues with which Jews in Britain and further afield were confronted in the 1930s. Whilst not straying too far from the editorial line, it nevertheless offered a series of in-depth, thought-provoking articles which consistently attracted contributions to the correspondence columns. An article on 'The Question of Defence' in July 1936, for example, directly confronted the issue of Jewish responses to antisemitism in Britain and made a major contribution to the ongoing debate.

While the issue of antisemitism in Britain was of profound importance to the Jewish community the concerns of Anglo-Jewry stretched well beyond Britain's national frontiers. The Jewish community was well aware of its international nature and this is reflected in the prioritising of the issues in the JC.

A striking feature of the paper is the predominance of foreign over domestic issues, in which 'Palestine and Zionism' emerges as the topic most frequently covered. This period saw major international diplomatic activity in this area, in which high ranking officials of the British Government were centrally involved. It was an issue of relevance if not immediate practical import for large sectors of Anglo-Jewry. More pertinent was the often highlighted growth and development of Nazism. Events in Germany were widely reported in the JC and had a profound influence upon the community's conception of antisemitism as a general phenomenon, and a major bearing on British Jewry's comprehension of domestic antisemitism. In the years 1932 to 1935 when antisemitism in Britain was growing as a political movement there occurred the most extensive editorial coverage of Nazism in Germany.

Antisemitism in Britain constituted only one tenth of total editorials between 1932-39 but represented a third of the domestic total. In 1936, the year when antisemitism in Britain reached its climax, a third of all editorials but over four-fifths of domestic ones were on this topic. The insertion of 'Jewish Defence' in June 1936 as a regular feature often claimed upwards of four pages in any one issue, so that if editorial comment on this topic was somewhat limited, the issue itself received extensive coverage in the paper as a whole.

For the most part, the JC editorial line conformed to the views of the established communal leadership and only rarely were there outstanding points of disagreement. If the leadership was criticised by the JC, it occasionally reacted defensively, but more commonly accepted it as legitimate criticism from within. However, at the most intensive point of antisemitic agitation in June 1936, relations were temporarily strained as the BoD procrastinated over its defence policy, whilst urgent demands were rising from the community. The issue of antisemitism in Britain served to highlight many of the wider conflicts in the community and the JC was not immune from the process. In his reporting of antisemitism, there was a discernible departure by the paper's 'special correspondent' from the editorial line which was vividly demonstrated in the reporting of 'Cable Street' in 1936 (where the BUF were prevented from marching through the East End of London). Thus whilst the paper generally



reflected an 'establishment' view, the nature of circumstances and period brought alternative views to the fore. The JC in the 1930s provides a most productive medium through which to study the period from within the Jewish community.

## The nature of the antisemitic threat

Antisemitism has been broadly defined as a hostility to Jews as such. Because it has taken so many forms, political analysts are reluctant to claim a more precise definition of the general phenomenon. The internal understanding and the responses by Jews to it in a specific period, recognised and revealed through its primary communal press organ, are particularly important to understand.

In 1932, the level of unemployment in Britain was approaching three million. Alongside other working people, much of the Jewish community was affected, but often the difficulties for Jews seeking work were exacerbated as they encountered shop window notices affirming 'every man on our pay list is a British-born Christian', and adverts in the press which stipulated 'applicants must be first-class workers, of refined manners and appearance, and gentiles'. While these discriminatory practices were common occurrences they did not constitute the major form of antisemitism in this period. This was the organised attack upon the Jewish community, verbal, written and often physical, propagated by the leaders and supporters of a political party, the BUF, even if the latter did not have the monopoly on political antisemitism in this decade. Attacks of equal and often greater verbal virulence were perpetrated by smaller organisations such as the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and the National Socialist Workers Party and by individual orators such as John Penfold (aka Peter the Hermit). Many disturbing assaults upon Jewry came through other outlets not seeking political capital, but nevertheless capable of reaching large audiences such as the clergy; there were many instances of antisemitism being propagated through Catholic newspapers. The many instances of frequent (but non-systematic) antisemitism were indicative of the climate within which an organised antisemitic force could flourish. Such incidents, though they pale by comparison with the force of intensive and co-ordinated attacks are important precisely because they were given prominence in the Jewish press. It pointed to a fear and sensitivity within the community that should not be dismissed in evaluating the threat posed.

By the end of 1937, the BUF were very much in decline but in their wake there appeared a new threat to the community. Though arising from external circumstances it illustrated the potential for an internal campaign to build upon the groundwork that had been laid by the politically motivated antisemites beforehand. This was the case of the 'aliens scare' of 1938 to

1939 instigated mainly by popular newspapers in response to the influx of 11,000 Austrian and German Jews.

The core of the antisemitic threat can be illustrated by detailing a selection of general incidents and practices, and by focusing on the organized activities of the BUF. Of particular importance is the element of racial ideology within the ideas of the BUF, and their conception of Jewry. This allows us to breach the surface ambiguity of the contention stated by W Joyce, Director of BUF propaganda, that their movement 'does not attack Jews by reason of what they are but by reason of what they do', whilst simultaneously claiming 'the Jew is a foreigner . . . he is not of our race'.

### The Generalised Antipathy

Of the general assortment of antisemitic instances, the most immediately threatening to individual Jews were the physical attacks upon Jewish people and property which occurred throughout this period, reaching a peak in 1936. In many instances where offenders were apprehended, the court proceedings disclosed that they were members of the BUF. Among the people physically assaulted were many very young and elderly Jews, notable in the light of the claim made by the BUF well into 1936 that they were not antisemitic but merely opposed those Jews who, through alleged positions of power and influence, were organising themselves against the BUF and the national interest. The foremost target of attacks on Jewish communal property were synagogues, vandalised in many areas such as Leeds, Gateshead, Manchester, and many parts of London. In Gateshead in 1935, for example, the Bensham synagogue was desecrated twice in a period of three weeks and posters were affixed proclaiming 'Down with the Jews'. In Bethnal Green in 1939, during the festival of Passover, a pig's head was left at a synagogue. Other repeated targets were Jewish owned shops, and frequently Jewish shopkeepers. Walls and pavements were regularly daubed with antisemitic messages often urging people to boycott Jewish owned shops. During the 1930s the slogans increased in their daring and virulence and by 1939, in Rochdale, huge lettering on a wall announced that 'Jewish blood will flow in the gutters'.

Other incidents and practices identified through the JC as antisemitic, or as dangerous and threatening for Jews, were directly matters of discrimination, practical and ideological. Shop window notices and newspaper adverts for job vacancies which indicated that Jews would be inadmissible were particularly common in trades in which a significant proportion of Jews were employed, such as tailoring and hairdressing, and

suggests that it was not based on random attitudes but upon a conflict over resources that had become 'racialized'. A form of discriminatory practice that was the subject of considerable exposure by investigative journalists was that conducted by insurance companies. Much evidence was discovered that leading insurance companies were boycotting Jews as 'bad risks'. One company listed Jews among other 'untrustworthy individuals' such as 'music-hall artists, theatrical agents, book-makers, foreigners' to whom they did not offer insurance. On car insurance, increased premiums were often charged in areas with a high accident rate which in practice coincided with areas of very high Jewish concentration.

Social exclusion from clubs and associations had long been practised against Jews. One case which attracted considerable publicity occurred at Middlesborough Motor Club in December 1933 and resulted in the President and other leading members resigning. The Motor Club Committee exemplified a particular justification of antisemitic discrimination 'being of the opinion that Jews and gentiles do not mix socially in numbers'. They added 'A Jewish member was one of the first to say we had sufficient numbers'. More serious practices related to housing. It transpired that Jews were being excluded from certain flats in Glasgow built with the aid of a government subsidy. The Glasgow Jewish community, pointing out that it paid its taxes alongside others, was incensed at this practice and registered its complaint. Its anger grew when the Scottish Under Secretary proposed a quota system. Meanwhile in Walthamstow, London, a property company was denying Jews access to a block of flats. Disclaiming discrimination against Jews as such, the company justified its exclusion on the grounds that its gentile tenants objected. Further discrimination occurred in the Law Courts. One particular example may be cited from Leeds in July 1933. In a case following a fatal car accident in which the driver was Jewish the Coroner contended that there were too many Jews on the jury (there were five) implying that they would on account of their imputed shared identity act in unison to defend their fellow Jew whether innocent or guilty, thus assuming Jewry to be an homogeneous corporate entity.

The incidents of ideological antisemitism which the JC drew attention to frequently involved clergy, often of high standing. Addressing his congregation at Ilford Catholic Church in August 1934 on 'the evils of the unclean film industry', Canon Palmer recommended that 'a strict boycott of all picture houses should be considered until such Jewish filth is swept right away'. Although many churchleaders were forthright in denouncing



antisemitism, many incidents occurred which particularly involved the Catholic Church. The central theme of their attacks was the association of Jewry with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. The notion of an international Jewish Communist conspiracy had become a popular antisemitic myth following the First World War. It had evolved from an earlier notion of a Jewish conspiracy outlined in the notorious Tsarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. In December 1932 for example, a Canon Byrne delivered a sermon on 'Jewish materialism' in which he blamed Jewry for the Bolshevik revolution. The *Catholic Herald* reported a meeting at Hanwell to protest the persecution of Christians in the USSR, in which the Bolsheviks and Jewry were accused over the upheavals that had brought about the deterioration in the position of Christians. An article in the *Catholic Gazette* of July 1936 was considered by the JC to have been 'redolent of the Protocols', and the *Catholic Times* printed an article headlined 'The Jewish Plan for World Domination' by a Father Fahey. Such defamation was not restricted to the Catholic Church: a Reverend Armitage of Bootle preached sermons in the 'International Jew'. As the danger of World War loomed again in 1939, Dr Inge, the former Dean of St Paul's, argued in a Church of England newspaper that "the danger of war is not from Germany or Italy, but from "Reds" ready to pick quarrels, supported by the Jews who are using their not inconsiderable influence in the press and in parliament to embroil us with Germany'.

Newspapers also provided the medium for other forms of antisemitism. The *Daily Express* granted space for a sizeable article by the high ranking Nazi, Goebbels, and local newspapers frequently presented a forum for individual antisemites to air their views. The *Daily Express* was further reproached for the impetus it may have given to antisemitism among the young. A children's feature describing the New Testament story told how Christ had been 'put to death by the cruel Jews'. The inculcation of youth with antisemitism came to the fore again with the teaching of 'Shylock' in schools with its antisemitic stereotyping. Even more disquieting for the Jewish community was the revelation of the use of German text books, one of which included a nefarious attack on Jews by Goebbels and the other, excerpts from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

The force of antisemitism as expressed in a particular instance depended both on the extent of circulation and on the nature of the perpetrator. A letter, for example, in a local newspaper, though adding to the accumulation of defamation, was limited in its general appeal. But there existed in Britain in the 1930s,

people holding high positions in political or social life, or renowned through the arts, who were widely respected and reported, and their views acquired extra legitimacy. A number of such people pledged their allegiance to the cause of combating antisemitism and fascism. There were others whose role in relation to antisemitism was quite the opposite. The author H G Wells had a series of polemics with the JC in which he consistently denied the legitimacy of Jews as a self-defined group. He claimed that Jewish culture was narrow and racially egotistical and that their separatism comprised the justification of antisemitism. 'It may not be a bad thing', he argued, 'if they (the Jews) thought themselves out of existence altogether'. Fellow author J B Priestley was embroiled in a controversy surrounding the participation of Jews in enterprise and finance. In an article entitled 'This Jew Business' which was ostensibly a reply to antisemitism, he suggested that there should be one Jew in every business but not at the top. Elsewhere in the publishers' lists was Douglas Reed, a former foreign correspondent of *The Times*, who emerged as a prolific and popular writer with a series of novels and social commentaries, most of which contained at least one chapter incorporating a multi-faceted attack on Jewry. Its key elements were an attack on their alleged foreignness, clannishness, and corporate action, which he believed inimical to the national interest, expressed in their striving for power and dominance. 'The Jews, when you give them full equality, use it to become a privileged group, not to become equals'.

Among political figures, a Norwich MP made a strong attack on the alleged Jewish control of the cinema. 'There are millions of boys and girls in this country . . . (whose) . . . souls are being taken from them as blood money for a syndicate of dirty American Jews — the Hollywood magnates'. Admiral Cayley, addressing a fete held by the Berwick Conservative Association commented on the aspirations of Herbert Samuel, 'Why should we want a Jew to lead our party?' He added for good measure, 'Hitler is quite right to a certain extent in getting rid of some of the Jewry of Germany. I am inclined to think that we may have to do the same at home'. Other political figures returned to the familiar theme of Jews and communism. Charles Kerr, the chief Liberal whip, claimed that there were 'many influential people in this country supporting the Communist Party, the insidious propaganda of which is backed by the Jews'. A similar message was more strongly put by the wife of Captain Ramsey MP, who believed that there was 'an international group of Jews behind world revolution in every single country at the present

time'. When challenged through the JC she reiterated the charges with the full backing of Captain Ramsey.

Both discrimination and ideology testified to the widespread nature of the belief, though held to different degrees, that Jews were an alien and disruptive force in society. The essence of their threat was seen as rooted in their united action. When Jews shared an activity it was evaluated differently from a group of gentiles engaged in the same activity. This was particularly the case in relation to Jews entering the professions. The conclusive example illustrating the general range of antisemitism in this period is that of Sir Henry Dale, guest of honour at a function hosted by the Jewish Hospital Medical Society. His speech caused much consternation, for he strongly argued against Jews 'crowding' the professions, claiming that he did not believe it more healthy for a predominantly non-Jewish people to receive all or most of their medical attention from Jews, 'than it would be for a Gentile nation to be subjected to a wholly Jewish government'.

#### Antisemitism as an Organized Movement

During the 1920s, numerous short-lived extreme nationalist and self-defined fascist political groups were established in Britain, such as the British Fascists, the British Empire Union, the National Citizens Union and the Imperial Fascist League. By 1932, the membership of these groups had, with the exception of the IFL, gravitated into the BUF, established by Mosley in 1932. The IFL resisted Mosley's call for union, and often described Mosley's party as 'British Jewnion' or 'Kosher Fascists': It saw as its enemies freemasonry, communism, Mosley and the Jews. The IFL attempted to show that the first three were dominated by the latter. The BUF dominated British fascism in the 1930s, being the only party of the radical right which succeeded in obtaining wide public attention and a measure of mass support. Its membership peaked in the years 1934 and 1935. Precise figures are unavailable but estimates vary between 17,000 and 35,000. Its catchment, however, was more widespread and it is claimed by Chesterton, a former leading member, that between 1932 and 1938, 100,000 people passed through the movement.

Many writers have identified the BUF's major asset as their leader, Oswald Mosley, whose personality was predominant in the movement. Having earlier been prominent in the Conservative and Labour Parties, in 1931 he formed the New Party which he conceived as a party of 'action based on youth' that would mobilize 'energy, vitality and manhood to save and rebuild the

nation'. The New Party was short lived but attracted significant support among disaffected members of the main parties. The significance of the New Party as a nucleus and ideological prefiguration of the BUF lay in its advocacy of the corporate state which was central to the BUF's national economic and social strategy. Rooted in conventional British politics, it acquired a distinctive style epitomised in the symbolic trappings of the fascist movement: the emblem, uniform, salute and paramilitary organisational basis. It had a rigidly hierarchical structure with an educated and distinctly middle-class leadership including Chesterton, Joyce, Raven-Thompson, Hawkins, Beckett and Allen.

There is little unanimity among scholars who have attempted to define fascism. There are difficulties in trying to isolate its ideology since its constituent elements are far from new and contain contradictory elements. The principal components of Mosley's movement at its inception were nationalism, corporatism and anti-communism, and these elements were united in their opposition to sectional interests. A crucial component of fascism identified by Michael Billig may be added. He contends that 'its ideology is expressed in a manner which poses a threat to democracy and personal freedom'. By 1934 the ideological foundations of the BUF had been transcended by an embracing antisemitic ideology which formed the basis upon which it embarked on its major period of agitation between 1934 and 1937, after which it declined rapidly. The BUF entered the British political scene under very favourable conditions. The economic circumstances were characterised by mass unemployment — it reached three million (23%) in 1933 — and falling living standards. The government lacked confidence and responded weakly. The late 1920s and early 1930s were further characterised by a loss of national prestige and influence. Meanwhile, fascism had triumphed in Italy and was making rapid progress in Germany.

The BUF failed to capitalise on the circumstances. It had originally attempted to build on a national basis but its success was limited to a few areas and by no means the most distressed ones. Seeking membership from a wide cross section of the population, it made a set of propaganda appeals to particular sectors, such as cotton workers, farmers, small shopkeepers and other unemployed, with varying degrees of success. During 1933 it sought the support of various establishment figures and for some months had the support, among others, of press baron Lord Rothermere. Such figures were more firmly rooted in traditional right wing conservatism and their support proved





*The uniformed British Union of Fascists on the march*

ephemeral. Unable to make sufficient headway on a national basis, its activities became concentrated in the areas surrounding Jewish populations, in particular the East End of London.

Its strategy and tactics were executed through public meetings, mass rallies and demonstrations, public sales of its weekly propaganda organ *The Blackshirt* and distribution of leaflets and pamphlets. Their propaganda was supplemented in 1936 through the publications *Action* and *Fascist Quarterly*. Their public rallies were notorious for the brutality of stewards towards any opposition, but the greatest menace from the standpoint of the Jewish community was in their street activities, open air meetings and physical intimidation. The technique they employed was concisely described by the JC special correspondent: 'intimidate opponents, arouse public excitement, make inflammatory appeals and then intrude the

most sensitive areas'. It was following a grave setback at such an attempted invasion that the BUF began to decline as a political force. Intending to march through the most sensitive areas of the East End of London, they were halted at Cable Street by the opposition of hundreds of thousands of East Enders, and eventually the police advised that the march be abandoned. A week later the BUF responded with a night of antisemitic terror in East London in which a Jewish man and child were thrown through a shop window, Jewish shops were raided and a car was overturned and set alight.

Given its emotive appeal, the BUF set great store upon its image. The events of Cable Street severely damaged its confidence and in the following months many leading activists resigned. The action of the Government in passing the Public Order Act, which forbade the wearing of political uniforms and considerably extended police powers, further contributed to its decline. Though acting on a physically diminished basis its antisemitic incitement continued and increased in its malevolence. For a period in 1937 it attempted to hold meetings in overwhelmingly Jewish populated streets, which ultimately met with banning orders. The political failure of the BUF was marked by its poor returns at the local elections of 1937.

The failure of the BUF must also be seen in the context which had contributed to its early potential. Its central policy of corporatism was developed as the response to 'the crisis'. But this 'crisis' was short-lived with Britain's economic recovery occurring more rapidly than other European nations followed by a period of increasing domestic stability and national consensus which militated against the success of a party such as the BUF. Despite its political failing, it was able through intense activity to play a major role in exacerbating the existing level of antisemitism in certain areas and in winning new adherents to antisemitism, particularly among younger people.

#### **Ideology of the BUF**

Within weeks of its inception, the BUF was vigorously denying that it was in any way antisemitic, and was recruiting some Jewish members. Its image portrayed a new political party subscribing to a fascist ideology whose central notion was the corporate state and an opposition to sectional interests within the state. This opposition carried the germ of a threat to many particularist groups in society including Anglo-Jewry. Through the activities of other groups which had identified themselves as fascist, this ideology was increasingly associated with a dubious position on the Jewish question. The BUF claimed

'antisemitism was no issue of fascism'. Beyond denial, the BUF proclaimed that antisemitism was forbidden in their movement, but in a relatively short space of time this line had undergone considerable modification. Increasingly the denials of antisemitism were conditional, subject to the qualification that Jews should not act in ways inimical to the national interest. 'Any British citizen, Jew of gentile who is loyal to Great Britain will always have a square deal from us'. The treatment to be meted out to Jews who did not conform to the BUF's requirements was initially left vague. Gradually the line was adopted that they would be treated as aliens and denied substantial civil and political rights. In March 1935 at a major public meeting in the Albert Hall, Mosley declared that the Jew must put Britain first or be deported, and his declaration that 'Fascism alone dares to challenge the international Jew' was greeted with rapturous applause. The elements among Jewry portrayed as against the national interest were those allegedly engaged in non-productive international finance and those supporting internationalist political movements embodied par excellence in the Communist Party. Mosley attacked these elements whilst denying antisemitism, maintaining that fascism was opposed both to finance-capital and to Communism. As the movement developed, it progressively identified Jews as the origin of both, and began to associate these contrary elements together within a conspiratorial framework. Rather than representing particular 'disloyal' elements within Jewry they came to be seen as representing Jewry itself as a single integrated corporate group. In the BUF scheme it eventually became impossible for Jews as a whole to be other than an utterly alien element, necessarily seeking to undermine fascism: William Joyce announced: 'We pledge ourselves to rid the country of the Jews'.

The ideological armoury mobilised against the Jewish community had many elements. The principal drive was upon 'international Jewish finance' and this was the key to a host of other accusations. It was claimed that the price of gold was determined by five Jewish firms; that the Bank of England was under Jewish influence; the Chamber of Commerce 'Jew ridden' and the press and big business victims of organized blackmail. There were attempts by rival fascist groups to assert that the press was directly under Jewish control, but this claim was easily refutable, so the BUF postulated a more complex relationship, whereby the Jews did not own the press but controlled it by threatening a boycott of advertising unless the newspapers promoted Jewish interests. This was powerful since its refutation rests purely upon denial by the press controllers rather than

permitting objective demonstration of its fallacy. Additionally, by suggesting that Jewish financial machinations were of such a degree that their absence would have serious consequences, it reinforced mythical notions about the nature and extent of Jewish financial power.

International finance was equally seen as being the key to the alleged political power of Jewry. The conventional political parties were denounced as the parties of organised Jewry, and once more it was not necessary to show a large representation of Jewish MPs in order to successfully suggest that the political parties served Jewish interests. The great issue in which the BUF emphasised Jewish control over British political life was that of war. 'Shall the Jews drag Britain to war?' asked *The Blackshirt* in November 1933. The BUF later popularised the slogan 'We will not fight in a Jewish quarrel'. In 1938, Mosley claimed that the Labour Party was dragging Britain to war 'at the instigation of its master — international Jewish finance'.

The core of the ideological attack was indirect, but it was capable of being linked to very direct issues, as was demonstrated particularly by BUF activity in northern industrial towns. Speaking in Ashton, Mosley declared: 'The international Jew sits in London and ruins Lancashire', and in Leeds he concentrated his attack on alleged Jewish control of the British woollen and furniture trades. On a grander scale, Jews were accused of owning the Empire, which was coupled with the accusation that they had not fought for it. This appealed to a notion of reclamation that was used extensively in BUF propaganda as it increasingly identified assets which it asserted had once been the property of Englishmen but had since fallen into the hands of Jews, who placed an exclusive stranglehold upon them. A BUF pamphlet claimed:

'Not so long ago East London was the home of British stock. The cabinet-maker, polisher and tailor were Englishmen. Today the Englishman in East London is the slave of the Jewish master'.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst the Englishman fought in the War, the Jew, it was argued, was profiteering, stealing jobs and acquiring property.

The strength of an indirect attack upon a barely visible enemy lies in the way it erects an absolutely flexible and logically irrefutable system capable of explaining all cases. As the demonstration of objective reality undermines successive layers of the argument, so the explanatory key, the hidden hand, becomes more elusive and more powerful. It constitutes a comprehensive and consistent view of social reality. But in



its indirect nature lies its weakness; difficult to negate, it is equally hard to prove. In the initial period of allegations against Jewish finance, the leaders of the Jewish community challenged Mosley to 'name the names' — he did not take up the challenge.

In 1937 the BUF initiated a campaign of gross personal slander against individual well-known Jews. It associated genuine social evils with these Jewish names, and then sought to accuse the whole Jewish people of being responsible for such evils. Plausible as it may be to believe in the controlling force of a hidden group this could not completely satisfy the demands and the experience of the social movement upon which the BUF were acting. For East London, where the campaign was concentrated, was predominantly a working-class area and the Jews they experienced were not international financiers but working-class people who lacked political and economic power. There were however a number of Jewish employers, particularly in the clothing and furniture trade, and the BUF lost no opportunity to accuse them of victimising fascists and reproach them with a range of disreputable business practices, usually undercutting and sweating. Jewish workers were accused of 'crowding' occupations and of excluding 'native Britons', and the BUF made many appeals to workers in industries where high proportions of Jews worked. In 1938, Mosley was championing the cause of 'English-born taxi drivers'.

The principal allegation levelled against working-class Jews was that they were communists and that 'Jews had declared war on Fascism'. Constant references were made to 'Jewish razor gangs' and figures produced to demonstrate that Jews were the principal offenders among people convicted for assaults upon fascists. The images of Jewish savagery that were conjured up were frequently accompanied by crude sexual innuendo and accusations that Jews exploited sexual vice. At Bethnal Green in August 1936, popular local speaker Mick Clarke urged the crowd to take up the struggle against Jewry if they did not want to see 'our churches pulled down, our children's eyes torn out and nuns carried through the street and raped'.

In this broad ideological onslaught the widest and most differing elements in Jewish society were assailed, and through a process of stereotyping and scapegoating the attack was extended to ever-increasing numbers of Jewry. Nevertheless the BUF continued to claim that the opposition to Jews was a political response to their activities and not to their existence. Jews were accused of organising themselves as a racial interest and as constituting themselves as a foreign body. These accusations imply acts of will and do not appeal to a biological determinism

characteristic of racial ideology. Particularly in the most intensive period of antisemitic agitation, and especially through street meetings, much use was nonetheless made of racial language even if a coherent racial ideology was not elaborated.

Early statements against Jews denoting them as alien had a geographical rather than biological reference, but this came to be elaborated in terms of alien type. Rather than use the word Jew, they preferred 'Eastern', 'Levantine' and most commonly 'Oriental'. Speakers argued that it was necessary 'to purge from our lifeblood the Oriental element'. 'Oriental' indicated more than merely a cultural phenomenon. In claiming that 'an Oriental merchant can sentence a British man or woman to starvation' it was argued that Jewish finance had no sense of obligation to the West; it had no sense of kinship with Western peoples. Soon it was claimed that 'those who oppose fascism are not of our flesh and blood; you English are blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh; the gloves must be taken off — it is gentiles v Jews, white man v black man.' In late 1936 it became increasingly common for BUF speakers to refer to their audience as (superior) 'white men'. Others sought to dehumanise the Jew by referring to them as 'rats and vermin from the gutters of Whitechapel', and ultimately William Joyce declared at Bethnal Green, 'Jews are Oriental sub men . . . an incredible species of sub-humanity . . . a type of sub-human creature'.

To assume in these proclamations an inexorable logic leading towards a more pronounced racial ideology would be to underestimate the differing nature and levels of adherence to anti-semitism. There is still debate about the development of anti-semitism in BUF ideology and of Mosley's personal beliefs on the Jewish question.

There is agreement that at the outset the BUF was not overtly antisemitic. One view sees the shift from anti-communism to antisemitism as the act of a desperate movement, primarily opportunistic and instrumental. Its aim was to obtain greater working-class support. Rather than elaborate a racial ideology, the BUF exploited political racialism. A more complex view sees antisemitism as being progressively incorporated into an existing ideology which was fundamentally anti-democratic and anti-modern. It was only a small ideological step to identify Jews as the 'modern menace' and the existence of convinced antisemites among Mosley's inner-core facilitated the process. The genesis and extension of antisemitism in the BUF is located in the logic and dynamics of the fascist movement. Certainly in the latter 1930s, convinced racial antisemites were comfortably entrenched in the apparatus of the BUF.



A flag symbolises the British variant of international fascism

### The Anti-Alien Campaign

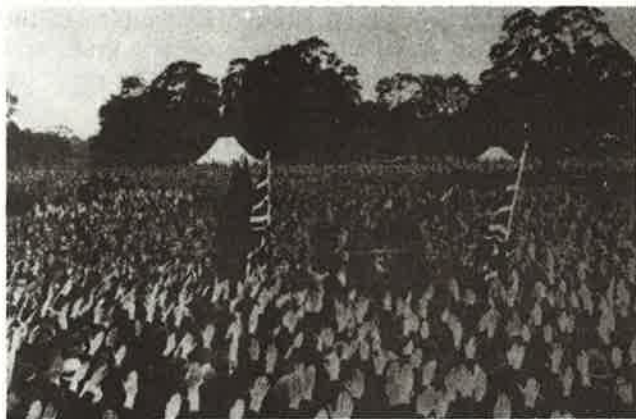
In June 1938, billboards advertising the *Sunday Express* were adorned with the bald headline 'THE JEWS' referring to a forthcoming article about the position of the Jews in Nazi Germany. It argued that antisemitism had grown because German Jews had become too prosperous, and it generally furnished a sympathetic case towards the anti-Jewish measures that had been taken. The focus was then shifted back to England where, it was claimed, 'half a million Jews find their home', and that, 'Just now there is a big influx of foreign Jews

into Britain. . . . They are over-running the country'. Thus the 'aliens' scare was initiated. The *Express* was swiftly followed by other local and national newspapers. The *Hampstead Advertiser* claimed that 'The police are becoming more and more concerned about Jews who are smuggled into the country without passports and who set themselves up in business . . . from the sale of dope'. This was then expanded in the *Sunday Pictorial*. A regular columnist in the *Evening Standard* wrote, 'It is felt by many people that we hear too much about the troubles of the Jews'. He went on to assert that: 'The Jews possess a great and occult power' and 'an international organisation'. The press campaign continued over a period of many months.

Towards the end of the period, the dominant theme was employment. The *Sunday Express* claimed that 'aliens who can hardly speak English are now driving London taxicabs and forcing British drivers off the streets'. The *Sunday Pictorial* carried the headline, 'REFUGEES GET JOBS, BRITONS GET DOLE'. The impact of the campaign was illustrated in the case of three aliens charged with illegal entry. Magistrate Metcalfe, who since 1932 had dealt with many cases arising out of disturbances between fascists and Jews, sentenced the three to six months hard labour with recommendation for deportation, and declared, 'The way Jews from Germany are pouring in from every port in the country is fast becoming an outrage'. His statement was prominently reported in the *Evening Standard* whose billboards announced 'ALIEN JEWS POURING IN — MAGISTRATE'. Metcalfe later apologised for his remarks which were intended as a general statement on aliens, not specifically Jews, who given 'proper safeguards and reasonable numbers' should be granted entry. The immediate consequence of the campaign was a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents which included the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Miles Platting with large chalked slogans: 'We will not have Austria's Jews'; '2,000,000 unemployed, 1,000,000 foreign Jews'.

The BUF attempted to exploit the 'Jew consciousness' that the anti-alien campaign had engendered, but by this time it had declined and its fascist ideology had been largely discredited. Nevertheless in the aftermath of its activities a strong impression of antisemitism remained, and many elements they had brought to the fore were consolidated in the anti-alien campaign. When challenged by the JC on the necessity for such extensive coverage, the editor of the *Sunday Pictorial* replied that there was indeed a 'Jewish Question' in Britain. The nature of the question was reduced to the conflict of resources between Jews and Britons, and Jews, alien and resident, were treated as

an integral whole. The persistent allegations by the BUF of discreditable business practices provided a useful platform on which to build the notion of Jews' involvement in a 'racket'. Further accusations referred to notions of exclusion and reclamation, prominent in the BUF's ideological armoury. The demise of the organised antisemitic movement did not halt the crystallizing of populist antisemitism.



*Above: BUF supporters hail Mosley at a rally in Hyde Park  
Below: Police attack anti-fascist demonstrators in East London*



## How Jews perceived the threat

The competing explanations offered for antisemitism in history have included many elements; political, social, economic and religious, and these were present in varying degrees in perceptions among Jews in this period. They were not accorded equal weight however and it is necessary to identify and understand the dominance of particular explanations of antisemitism. Whilst these historical explanations are useful in accounting for the general existence of antisemitism they are not in themselves adequate to an understanding of its degree in a particular period. This needs an analysis not merely of the origin but of the specific reproduction of antisemitism. The dominant historical conceptions subscribed to by the communal leaders of Jewry in the 1930s were faced with a growing awareness of an intensifying and many-sided threat. Their conceptions of antisemitism were inseparably linked with a set of beliefs about British society, which they believed set limits on the potential of antisemitism to take root here. Thus the version of fascism promoted by the antisemitic political party, the BUF, was understood as being an imported ideology rather than possessing domestic roots. The reasons just reviewed for the BUF's failure were not those of the leaders of Jewry, whose particular interpretations reinforced their beliefs about British society. Whilst their understanding reflects their evaluation of Britain it equally reveals their ideas about the position and participation of the Jewish community within British society.

### The Communal Orthodoxy

The Anglo-Jewish leadership generally understood antisemitism as an external phenomenon, geographically confined in the main to other European nations. It was seen as essentially rooted in historical religious rivalry in Christendom, a view consistent with the communal self-image as a religiously defined minority. It was recognised that antisemitism could be intensified within a context of economic distress, but did not originate in economic conflict. With the rise to political power of Hitler in Germany on a brazenly antisemitic platform, it was necessarily viewed in part as a political phenomenon, but its political form was generally considered derivative rather than representing a cause itself. This view was allied with ideas about the social roots of antisemitism and the constitution of antisemites. They were characterised as victims of ignorance, ill-balanced, or motivated by irrational hatred. Its spread was consistently



likened to a disease; a formulation that denied the applicability of a rigorous social scientific analysis seeking to locate anti-semitism as a phenomenon rooted in social, political, economic and cultural relationships in the society in which it emerged.

An editorial in the JC in September 1932 characterised anti-semitism as 'a persistent moral and mental disease' and this belief was given further legitimacy through similar characterisation by leading churchmen and politicians. The Bishop of Chichester labelled anti-semitism 'a poison . . . a contagious disease spreading to countries where a few years ago it would have never been dreamt of'. When the leaders of Anglo-Jewry subscribed to this view, they also subscribed to a particular view of the agitation against Jewish immigrants in the East End at the turn of the century which had culminated in the Aliens Act of 1905. This agitation was characterised as being generally anti-alien in essence rather than specifically anti-semitic. Laski claimed that since 1858 there had been no 'Jewish problem' in England:

"The late nineteenth century influx of Jews from Russia and Poland was strictly speaking an alien not a Jewish problem. Jews already here were not affected."<sup>8</sup>

As illustrated previously organised anti-semitism was not a pathological phenomenon but a dynamic political development that built upon and exploited genuine social and economic conflicts and a widespread disaffection with the solutions offered by the conventional political parties. The general analysis of anti-semitism and the accompanying belief in the particularly liberal and tolerant nature of British society held by the communal leaders militated against even acknowledging the genuine presence of this development. Anti-semitic fascism was considered an imported ideology and fascism per se was seen to have no logical connection with anti-semitism, so that if fascist platforms were used for anti-semitic propaganda, then 'Jewish defence' was conceived as resisting their anti-semitism not their fascism. Fascism was viewed as an issue for Jews as individual citizens only, not as Jews. An anti-semitic group active in Liverpool in 1933 were dismissed as 'amateur Nazis — made in Germany' and 'imitators among unstable individuals'. As the policy of the BUF became more overtly anti-semitic it was increasingly characterised as a force alien to British politics. Its decisive shift from a generalised elevation of the nation and a consequent anti-alienism towards a particularized anti-semitism was interpreted as 'a sudden flight to Hitlerism'. The precise

geographical locus of British anti-semitism was identified by the Reverend Levy of Bayswater Synagogue. 'If there was an alien immigrant to be expelled from this country, it was the alien immigrant of anti-semitism which came from Germany'. Mosley's slogan of 'Britain First' was questioned, since his movement was utilising 'foreign political ideas and methods'. The methods of the BUF which had marked them off from the conventional political parties were understood by many in the Jewish community as typifying the 'alien' nature of the movement: 'Jews' security and livelihood were threatened by an unscrupulous, ambitious politician working with un-British weapons and drawing ammunition from Nazi arsenals': the present menace has not risen out of the British experience but out of a world situation and a philosophy inspired from without.'

Once again the prevalent notions held by the Jewish communal leadership were reinforced by similar characterisations of fascism by influential non-Jews. Just as fascism had used the mystical and unscientific notion of a hidden and sinister, all-pervading Jewish conspiracy, which in the British context was interpreted as a foreign import, likewise was fascism perceived in what appears as a mirror image. Doubtless there was an element of debating technique and using the opposing ideology against itself when Hugh Dalton described fascism as an 'ugly, sinister and international conspiracy . . . British Jews and gentiles must stand united against this hateful importation from abroad'. But if fascist anti-semitism was viewed in essence as an artificial European import then what was at issue was not merely the understanding of fascism but the evaluation of British society.

Wide sections of the Jewish community believed that the accumulated cultural and political character of Britain stood as a firm guarantee against the domestic growth and flourishing of anti-semitism. Various characteristics were attributed to the British body politic, the most common being: fair play, love of freedom, tolerance, humanity, commonsense, sense of justice, and fairmindedness. Further qualities were added in a JC article responding to attacks by the BUF on Jewish boxing promoters. They retorted: 'There was no mention of the part played by Jews as competitors, where they have displayed fine examples of British grit, tenacity and courage'. The communal leaders believed that, despite the defamation of Jews in some quarters, they had the sympathy of the vast majority of people in the country. The strength with which such notions were held can be illustrated by concrete examples.

In August 1934, the JC reported an official visit by the Jewish Historical Society to Lincoln, where seven hundred years earlier the accusation of Jewish ritual murder had been sedulously propagated. It warmly welcomed the 'striking denunciation by the ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries of the foul ritual murder lie', but added significantly, 'not that there was much need in this country'. Two years later, the IFL published the notorious blood libel in its newspaper. During this period the general situation had worsened considerably. Defamation of Jews was increasing, as were demands in the community for stronger defence measures. The IFL leader and publisher were successfully sued for seditious libel, but in acknowledging the incident itself, the JC recoiled with shock from the reality of the blood libel's contemporary publication, declaring 'this, in civilized England'.

When Lord Rothermere gave his powerful backing to the BUF in January 1933, the JC cautiously suggested that they did not overestimate the importance of his adhesion to the fascist cause. Unwilling to tolerate the nature and extent of the antisemitism and the stark brutality of their methods, Rothermere abandoned and denounced the BUF. The JC claimed that 'Rothermere's repudiation of antisemitism represents the best and noblest traditions in English life'. It was derived from the 'British instinctive love of fair play and repugnance of injustice'.

There were difficulties in this position. For when Rothermere was supporting the BUF, both he and Mosley were characterised, and responded to, as British gentlemen, possessed of the various imputed qualities. Both had similar social backgrounds and were closely identified with British public life: Rothermere through ownership of a daily national newspaper and Mosley through his political career. Early hints of Mosley's antisemitism, following the inception of the BUF, were dismissed with the certainty that 'On reflection we are sure Sir Oswald will see the illogicality of his attitude'. Nevertheless, when Rothermere expressed his disapproval of antisemitism whilst Mosley continued to incorporate it, the latter was viewed as placing himself outside the sentiment of the nation. When antisemitism was brought publicly to the fore at the Albert Hall meeting in November 1934, the JC commented:

'In attacking the Jews he mistakes the spirit of his fellow countrymen as much as he misjudges the Jews. Britain is not Germany and has no time for garbage rummaged from the dustbins of continental antisemitism.'<sup>9</sup>

It was clearly the case, however, that by 1936, the BUF was accurately reflecting the spirit of a substantial section of their fellow countrymen in the East End of London and providing a focal point for their aspirations. But, at the peak of the agitation, 'Watchman' declared that there was:

'no ground for panic . . . The political instinct, masculine commonsense, to say nothing of the traditional quality of fair play were unlikely to desert the British people at the instance of a second band Hitler'.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst cautiously welcoming the fact that a parliamentary debate on antisemitism was held in March 1936, the JC considered that 'It must have been painful to British sentiment that a parliamentary debate on Jew-baiting in London was deemed necessary in the public interest'. In the debate, Home Secretary Sir John Simon declared that the Jew was entitled to fair and proper treatment. By stating this he was merely reiterating a formal guarantee to the Jewish community in the face of a pronounced threat from a vociferous and active organised antisemitic body. Rather than purely welcoming this reiteration, the JC commented that this was 'only what one expects from a British Prime Minister' thus implying a particular set of standards based upon imputed national characteristics, whilst simultaneously indicating considerable uncertainty about the prescribed position of the Jewish community.

On the question of alien refugees, the JC conceded the argument that there were perhaps some legitimate feelings against free entry whilst unemployment was so marked, but concluded that compassionate sentiment based on 'the ingrained British spirit of fair play' would predominate. As the newspapers brought the issue of alien refugees to the fore in 1938 and 1939, their panic mongering was described as 'a deplorable departure from standards that have given the British press its high standing in the journalistic world'. Following the publication in the *Sunday Express* of its notorious article headlined 'The Jews', the JC asked, 'Does it accord with the fine British reputation for fair play and freedom?' Essentially the British 'way of life' was perceived as a set of norms derived from inherent or acquired characteristics and qualities which were believed to be an impenetrable barrier against the spread of antisemitism in British society.

It is instructive to record the parallel self-image of the British as perceived by dominant groups in society, and consider the extent to which it was internalised by the Jewish community and served to confirm their beliefs. The Dean of St Paul's stated



plainly that 'Jew-baiting is not an English sport' and Sir John Simon was convinced that 'the commonsense of the British people will prevail . . . the essence of British social life is tolerance . . . fascism and communism are utterly un-British in sentiment and purpose'. A particularly revealing expression of this self-image, combined with perceptions of Jews and antisemitism was contained in a letter to the Jewish Chronicle from the sales manager of a prominent property company in November 1933, which was headlined 'the British attitude to Jew-baiting'.

'May we . . . voice our feelings to the authorities concerned in the matter of the persecution in London of individual Jewish men and women. Some while ago unknown and so-called English people attempted in a lesser way to treat a few unfortunate traders after the manner of our late enemies the German nation, per their accredited leader Hitler. We feel, and we are sure the vast majority of all decent and law-abiding members of the British race feel also, that it is a crying disgrace to our country for it to be possible to bait and menace the Jews, just because of a few hot-heads who . . . lack brains enough to estimate the usefulness of the Jewish community not only in London, but in all parts of the world. After all, the Jew makes an excellent and law-abiding citizen. He works hard at his profession, trade and business. He quarrels with no one's religion . . . our experience is that the Jew is as good as the other man and sometimes even better.'<sup>11</sup>

In this period widely differing attitudes were held towards the Jewish presence in Britain, ranging from the view of Jews as an enrichment to society to those deeming their presence a cancerous growth to be removed. These attitudes cut across barriers of social class and status and reflected a British reality. If the leaders of Anglo-Jewry simply dismissed the sentiments which did not treat Jews with the tolerance they perceived as intrinsic to British social life, such attitudes nevertheless could not be dismissed as phenomena but required explanation. Every significant departure from the expectations placed upon Britons was characterised as 'un-British' and excused in terms of nefarious influence from abroad. Influential writers within the Jewish community sought more satisfactory explanations. Zukerman argued in 1936 that there was 'no place in Europe and possibly the world which presents a less fertile soil for antisemitism at the present moment than Great Britain', but he rejected the notion of inherent and lasting guarantees based upon imput-

ed 'natural' characteristics of the British nation. Equally he believed that culturally acquired attributes were liable to transformation over time. He nonetheless viewed the immediate prospects for Anglo-Jewry with cautious optimism derived from an evaluation of public sentiment in Britain and the 'state of mind of the British intelligentsia', which was, he believed, currently 'infused with an intense social idealism'. Thus he rested his case on the balance of social, political and cultural forces.

The cautious optimism of Zukerman, and Jewish communal leaders' attribution of particularly favourable characteristics to British society, often stood in stark contrast to the pessimism and anxieties expressed through the JC's correspondence columns by Jewish residents of the areas in which the antisemitic attacks were most concentrated. This contrast must be seen in the light of an attempt by the dominant groups in the community to successfully and securely integrate into the host society, and the development of a set of expectations about the society consistent with this ambition. Successful integration, they believed, demanded strong identification with the nation as a unitary whole, and this compelled the community to give constant proof of its patriotic pedigree, succinctly expressed by a JC Editorial in April 1939, with the world war looming: 'The antisemite is an anti-Briton'.

The range of views of British society illustrated through these examples provide the context in which Jewish communal perceptions and reactions to the intensifying antisemitic threat in this period can be understood. Chronologically they evolved in three phases reflecting the prominence of particular forms of antisemitism:

1st phase, 1932-1933, marked by individual acts and the incipient growth of the BUF;

2nd phase, 1934-1937, comprising the peak of public BUF agitation;

3rd phase, 1938-1939, dominated by the aliens scare and non-systematic popular antisemitism.

A dominant feature in the initial phase was the attempt by communal leaders to deny or, as far as possible, diminish the significance of any antisemitic outbreak. The early acts of vandalism were regarded as disquieting but unworthy of serious comment and the JC had 'no desire to exaggerate the importance of the incidents'. The perpetrators of such incidents were characterised as ill-informed, ill-balanced individuals and irresponsible hooligans. The first major demonstration by an organised antisemitic movement, a 2,000-strong Blackshirt march,

was seen as 'no bad thing' for 'this noisy movement was exhibited in all its pretentious insignificance'. It was not until Rothermere accused Mosley of antisemitism that the JC was prepared to support such a charge. It argued however that Mosley was originally opposed to antisemitism, but had come under pressure from his following. The newspaper articles appearing in the Catholic press were described as reckless levity.

As verbal and physical attacks upon Jews became increasingly frequent and took on the appearance of an organised campaign, so the Jewish community began to treat the threat more soberly. As parliament debated the East End terror and Morrison and Thurtle gave temperate revelations of the terror, insults and violence, so members of the BoD brought the issues to the attention of the wider community. Bertram Jacobs spoke of the 'communal mind . . . approaching a state of panic'. The sense of growing alarm within the community, particularly in the East End of London, was captured in a series of articles by the 'special correspondent' of the JC in July and August 1936. Often referring to interviews with local Jews, he wrote of a sense that here there was the beginning of what was happening in Germany, that the community was not satisfied that all the available means were being employed in its defence, and indicated a growing restlessness at the apparent inactivity of the police.

'No one who witnesses the weekly march of the fascists to their headquarters in Bethnal Green and sees the populace forming into two camps on opposite sides of the road can fail to realise the growing possibility of rioting and violence.'<sup>12</sup>

He asserted that antisemitism had always been latent in Bethnal Green and Stepney, explaining it in terms of 'an unreasoning dislike of the unlike', but recognised that a new and menacing ingredient had been added:

'For the first time antisemitism is a plank in the platform of an ambitious political party with a popular . . . programme, and the Blackshirts are rapidly "rationalizing" this old prejudice against the Jews so that its owners are ready and willing to give it expression in words and deeds.'<sup>13</sup>

'If the Blackshirts are allowed to continue their villainous campaign of lies and incitement, racial riots must not be regarded as an improbable result. This is not scaremongering but a serious and reasoned opinion arrived at quite dispassionately.'<sup>14</sup>

The extent of hostility, suspicion and insecurity that had been aroused was illustrated by cases where Jewish victims of physical assault were failing to appear as prosecution witnesses for fear of the consequences.

A recognition that previous sporadic, localised, non-party feeling against the Jew in the East End had been subject to change within materially altered circumstances gave rise to the need for a more penetrating analysis. The 'special correspondent' identified a latent antisemitism which the organised activities of the BUF had intensified beyond control. However Laski claimed that antisemitism was 'not rooted in the man in the street but cultivated and cultured by playing on his ignorance'. He understood antisemitism as being essentially anti-religious. When referring to ignorance, he generally meant ignorance of Judaism. An explanation that also utilised a concept of ignorance (in that it referred to generalisations in the absence of adequate information) but in a quite different direction to Laski, was suggested by local churchman Father Groser of Stepney, which simultaneously represented a challenge to the portrayal of antisemitism as simply irrational. Addressing the 'Stepney Council for Peace and Democracy' he argued the only means by which the BUF could obtain support in the East End was 'by bringing in something which cuts across the normal lives lived by the people'. He claimed that the majority of factories and wood-working trades in East London were owned by Jews and that the fascist could therefore approach the disconcerted person and say that the Jews were responsible for bad conditions. He noted that parallel conditions existed in the gentile-owned factories in the North and the Midlands but 'East Enders see little of conditions outside the East End and therefore swallow the propaganda'.

A particularly challenging analysis of antisemitism, within the context of fascism, which linked directly into Jewish communal response and the issue of alliances, was made by Zukerman in 1937. He contended that fascist antisemitism represented a strong class antagonism mixed with an anti-Jewish outburst manipulated by the BUF. Believing fascism to be, essentially, a middle-class movement — a view substantiated by a social analysis of its leadership — and building upon his earlier view that the East End Jew was no Jewish 'type' at all but part of the East End labour type, Zukerman argued that in the fascist scheme Jewish and non-Jewish East End labour equally represented the 'alien nation'. Therefore fascism was more political and economic than national and racial. 'In these days of nationalism it is bad form to show hostility to one's



own "alien nation" . . . the Jew is a more convenient outlet.' His analysis was noteworthy in that it drew a distinction between the surface appearance of fascist antisemitism and its essential logic. Most of the 'explanations' that were argued amongst the communal leadership merely skimmed the surface. The ideology was ridiculed for its irrationality without it being realised that contained within its contradictions was the basis of an appeal to mutually contradictory elements. As 1937 drew to a close the JC reprinted an item from the 'Daily Worker' illustrating the contradictory nature of antisemitic ideology:

'The Jew is a capitalist; the Jew is a communist. The Jew mixes with Christians; the Jew sticks too much to his own race. The Jew desires and foments war; the Jew is a pacifist and refuses to fight. England is the best country in the world; the Jews rule England.'<sup>15</sup>

The awakening of the Jewish community to the truly serious nature of the threat posed by organised antisemitism, and the widening gap between differing perceptions and understandings of it, was graphically illustrated by interpretations of the events of October 4th at Cable Street. The JC Editorial, which had in the previous week advised Jews to stay away from the demonstration, stated:

'Much as we detest the campaign waged by the Fascists, we cannot pretend to any satisfaction with the result . . . The chief effect is to enable Mosley to pose as a martyr to the cause of civil liberty and . . . win new recruits . . . The stopping of meetings and marches is a matter for the constituted authorities . . . On the long view we believe the action to be profoundly mistaken.'<sup>16</sup>

Having primarily attacked the active response to the fascists, the editorial then argued that the fascist cry of free speech was a bogus one, for their claim to free speech amounted to a license to single out Jewish areas, in which:

'humble traders are abused and assaulted, little children taught to lisp "Down with the Jews", Jewish residents afraid to leave their homes at night and as the Mayor of Bethnal Green has stated, it is impossible to walk the streets without fear of insult.'<sup>17</sup>

The special correspondent's report was markedly different. It was euphorically headlined: 'The People Said "NO!" — He



*Determined anti-fascists in the East End erect barricades to prevent the fascists marching through Cable Street*

Shall Not Pass — East End Answers Mosley', and read, 'On Sunday, fascism received the greatest blow that it has had yet in this country'.

#### Aliens and Legitimacy

Towards the end of the 1930s, as the BUF declined, the major threat to the Jewish community came through the growing anti-alien campaign. The JC commented: 'Recent exaggerated and misleading articles in the London press have produced an atmosphere little short of dangerous'. Despite the weakness of the fascists, growing anti-Jewish feeling in the country was identified. The threat was characterised as 'Douglas Reedism' (a reference to the author whose populist brand of antisemitism was discussed earlier). Yet towards the end of the period there was some dismay among official Jewish quarters about the community's 'refusal to wake up to the situation'. This



referred particularly to the failure in meeting the demands of the 'Defence fund' that was organised, and was accounted for in terms of 'fatalism . . . or the stupid and comfortable theory that "it cannot happen here"'. Such attitudes were consistent however with many aspects of the leadership's analysis. There was a contradiction between the community's earlier predisposition to dismiss the possibilities of antisemitism in Britain and its increasingly experienced reality. Attempts to discount the significance of accumulated individual incidents were made redundant through the active existence of a very real antisemitic political party. To a degree, the communal leaders could dismiss this party and its ideology as a foreign import and its supporters as either irrationally prejudiced or ignorant. But such explanations, given the widespread support for the BUF in certain areas, were inadequate; as were very general explanations of antisemitism which did not confront its particular character in this specific period. Explanations were sought which would not undermine an image of British society upon which attempts by the community to successfully integrate into British life depended; and so Anglo-Jewry came to place considerable responsibility for antisemitism upon itself, and in so doing, conceded many of the arguments advanced by the antisemites.

A constantly recurring theme in such self-criticism was the entry of many young Jews into the professions. At this time law and medicine were the main areas of increased Jewish entry, with accountancy also becoming popular, but many concerned Jews believed that a decentralization of Jewish economic life was a necessary step towards eradicating antisemitism. The 'rush to the professions' was considered harmful both in terms of 'crowding' and in terms of providing a superficial justification for the oft-stated belief that Jews were primarily engaged in non-productive labour. One writer argued that the issue was not the right of Jews to enter a profession, but the exercise of that right, implying that currently it may not be prudent for Jews to exercise that right. The dividing line between this view and one that denied Jews equal right to choose their occupation was precariously thin. At a conference held on Jewish Students and the Professions in April 1938, leading speaker Norman Bentwich argued that the growing excess of Jews in certain professions and in the numbers attending university was likely to engender antisemitism, and it was 'a matter for all Jewish students to consider seriously whether they are rendering the best service to themselves and their people by thronging certain professions'. These widely subscribed views on Jews and profes-

sions conceded the argument that the presence of Jews was a problem and that numbers were its essence. A dissenting view put by one correspondent to the JC argued that 'antisemites will accuse us whatever our occupations, but it is far better to be accused of being a nation of healers and lawyers than middlemen and moneylenders'.

The notion of 'numbers' was also prominent in arguments against the desirability of solid blocks of Jews congregating in particular districts. 'Excessive clannishness' was condemned by a correspondent to the JC, who argued for the breaking up of ghettos and sought to challenge antisemitism by having 'well behaved, intelligent Jewish families living among gentile neighbours'. Arguments were strongly put against Jews engaging in numbers, or even at all, in activities that might provide grounds for exploitation by antisemites. As activities of organised antisemites continued to provoke opposition, so this notion was applied to Jewish political activity. The BUF accused Jews of being communists, and many East End Jewish youth either joined or participated with communists against fascists. Such youths were berated by Basil Henriques QC for 'playing into the hands of the enemy'. In contrast a JC editorial of June 1936 argued that:

'communal laxity will drive Jewish youth into the arms of extremist anti-fascists. Don't let our leaders censure these developments if they come. The responsibility will lie at their own doors.'<sup>18</sup>

Underlying this issue was not merely the question of political tact but the right of Jews to participate as equals in society.

The predominant issue upon which some leading groups in Jewry regarded their fellow communal members as being responsible for antisemitism was their social behaviour. In particular Jewish leaders condemned Jews who 'by their materialism, vulgarity and ostentation were responsible for antisemitism'. Laski denounced flamboyant behaviour and the offences of the social climber and engaged in stern criticism of 'Jews who by their conduct create antisemitism'. A spate of letters appeared in the JC in 1937 and 1938 denouncing such actions as were deemed to foment antisemitism and offering remedies to this problem:

'The ever increasing ostentation by a small percentage of the community whose expensive and extravagant apparel and general flaunting of wealth cannot but create disgust and jealousy amongst non-Jews.'<sup>19</sup>

'The practice of photographing Jewish wedding



ceremonies for reproduction in the press is a particularly bad example of the oft-repeated charge of Jewish ostentation which so incenses (and rightly so) both Jews and non-Jews.'<sup>20</sup>

'Any synagogue member convicted of a serious crime should be expelled and denied Jewish burial rights.'<sup>21</sup>

'We should form a disciplinary committee to eliminate from our midst undesirable elements.'<sup>22</sup>

Though a process of stereotyping was recognised and the JC expressed its regret that Jews were judged by their worst rather than their best, rather than challenging the assumptions and motivations that underlay this process, the leaders of the community condemned those Jews who by their behaviour approximated to the generalisations made by antisemites; and equally failed to challenge the selective emphasis by which ostentation was considered worse when indulged in by Jews. Thus Jewry set itself standards which the wider society was not expected to match, and this was postulated as an effective response to antisemitism. The President of the Board of Guardians, Hannah Cohen, argued that Jews:

'have been prone to cry out against the injustice of antisemitism and not ready enough to see if by chance there is any shade of excuse for it. It is not enough that the Jew is no worse than his neighbour. He had to be a good deal better as the eyes of the world were upon him.'<sup>23</sup>

It was only at the latter end of the 1930s that the more established elements in the Jewish community began to question and counter this stereotyping. In the course of a talk entitled 'The Jew and his Neighbour', Basil Henriques had argued that when he was young there was, as far as he was aware, no antisemitism in Britain, and that if a problem has grown, it could be accounted for largely by the religious and social deterioration of the Jew. 'Watchman' responded in his JC column that antisemitism had existed for some time, and whilst Jewish error may have fed it, the causes were to be found elsewhere:

'The basis of such Jewish problem as exists in these islands lies . . . outside our own community. Jewish ostentation and wrong-doing may be invoked by our enemies but they can only illustrate the Jew-baiter's creed. They do not create it . . . Jews are the only community in the country . . . who are called upon to present a 100% blamelessness of conduct on pain of

their being put collectively in the dock.'<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in response to the 1938 newspaper campaign to suggest that there was an acute Jewish problem, the JC editorial replied:

'If there is a problem it is a problem of wrong-doers. It is only when on every possible occasion the wrong-doers are labelled Jewish and the whole Jewish people identified with them that a Jewish problem is in danger of developing.'<sup>25</sup>

The various ways in which the Jewish community perceived and reacted to the antisemitic threat — denial, foreign influence, and self-criticism — rested on beliefs about the nature of British society but revealed at every stage uncertainty about the actual and desired position of Jews within it. Early on, 'Watchman' referred more than once to the community's inferiority complex and explained it in terms of expectations. He did not analyse the root of these expectations but perhaps they reflected the failure of the community to confront the need to understand itself. In a later article he stated:

'We are confronted with the need for surveying our entire social position — internal as well as external relationships. We have to look at our social situation, religious position and the organisation we have contrived to carry our community along the dangerous currents of a disturbed age . . . In nothing have we shown less foresight than in the failure to keep pace with the changes in our social structure.'<sup>26</sup>

The dominant formulation among Jewish community leaders was that Anglo-Jewry constituted a *religious* group. As such they required *tolerance*. Whilst forcefully demanding the defence of their rights as a religious group, they were far less prone to argue for their cultural and political rights as *accepted* equals integral to the society in which they lived. The attack on the Jewish religion was peripheral to the main thrust of anti-Jewish defamation which comprised an all-encompassing attack upon Jewry as an *ethnic* group.

# The defence debate

The threat posed to Jews in Britain in the 1930s has been shown as being many-sided. It peaked in 1936 but remained strong and had taken new forms by the end of the decade. But if the threat was wide-ranging, the perception and comprehension of its nature by the leaders of the community under attack was narrow, and was considerably distanced from that of those experiencing the threat at close quarters. By July 1936 the danger could be diminished no more and voices both among the leadership and rank and file urged that the BoD and Jewry as a whole face up to the situation. At this stage, 'Jewry as a whole' constituted a simple statistical, but rather complex social reality, and the established leadership of the community found itself unable to command unified support behind its programme for combating antisemitism. A popular organisation called the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Antisemitism emerged, built on the basis of its closer awareness of the community's perception of the threat, and the required initiatives to combat it. Ultimately this body had a profound influence upon conceptions of antisemitism and its relationship with fascism as eventually adhered to by prevailing sections of the community. The extent of the rift preceding the JPC's foundation needs to be understood against the background both of the failure by the leadership to rigorously analyse the form and content of the threat, and the inadequacy of the actual advice it offered the community in terms of required responses, based on its understanding of the phenomenon.

Between 1932 and 1935 advice from community leaders was primarily concerned with the behaviour of Jews in response to the public activities of the BUF, who were holding meetings, demonstrations and public newspaper sales, as well as engaging in increasing physical intimidation and provocation of Jews. In this period the editorial policy of the JC was closely allied with representative leaders and other recognised figureheads of Anglo-Jewry, and gave prominence to their statements. As early as 1933, fights occurred between fascist newspaper sellers and Jews. The JC's evenhanded policy was that the fascists should not sell their papers if it was likely to be a provocation and Jews should act with restraint and dignity. As incidents recurred the emphasis of JC pronouncements was placed far more on demanding that Jews abstain from disorderly behaviour than in exposing the provocation of Jews by the fascists. Jews who engaged in physical encounters with fascists were deemed guilty

of 'stupid and disgraceful behaviour' and their actions characterised as 'a rank disservice to the Jewish people'. After the disturbances at the Olympia meeting at which the brutality of stewards against opposition forces was very marked, the JC invoked Jewish theology in condemning Jews involved in the disturbances:

'Jews who interfere with the full expression of opinion are false to the Jewish teachings of justice and fair play and are traitors to the vital material interests of the Jewish people.'<sup>27</sup>

Leaders of the Jewish community were principally concerned that this message should be conveyed to youth since it was they who were primarily engaged in opposition. Lord Bearsted advised the members of Stepney Jewish Youth Club to be loyal citizens and told them that it was both futile and unwise to join in demonstrations. Basil Henriques, addressing the Association for Jewish Youth, urged a pacific attitude, requesting youth to send antisemitic newspaper articles to the Press Committee of the BoD, and imploring them to conduct themselves in a dignified manner. The best answer to antisemitism, he assured them, was to be 'impeccable and blameless to the outside world'.

A similar and particularly revealing message was preached by Leonard Montefiore at an East End youth club. He likened the position of Jews to that of appearing before a jury. For a successful outcome, he argued, Jews 'must gain the middle-class of British opinion'. He apparently accepted that the Jews were on trial and stood accused, but did not enquire why they were arrested, only urged that they recognise the court and endeavour to justify themselves. This disclosed his conception of the position of Jews in Britain in which they did not form an integral part of British society and were obliged on demand to justify their presence. It simultaneously illustrated the social divide between the community leaders and those most directly threatened. Jews were advised to stay away from Blackshirt meetings, but to challenge Mosley with arguments and show fellow citizens that the accusations were false. The form of debating forum was left vague, but generally meant that the community was confined to the sidelines whilst the communal leaders such as Laski and Melchett disputed Mosley's claims through the press, and challenged him to 'name the names'. Mosley did not take up the challenge and the defamation of Jews continued.



## Leaders and Commentators

The two main strands of argument upon which such advice was given were that fascism as such was not an issue for Jews, and that Jews should act in a dignified manner when provoked. This required that they avoided public activities by the fascists, a general approach which illustrated an insufficient analysis of contemporary fascism. By 1934 it was made demonstrably clear that Jews were a major target in their opposition to sectional interests. It illustrated an erroneous belief that the growth and success of antisemitism depended not upon the level of activity of antisemites but upon the behaviour of Jews. The difficulties contained within such a standpoint came to the fore when the BUF announced its intention to hold its first major public demonstration at Hyde Park in September 1934. Aware of rumours of a counter demonstration, the JC declared:

'We urge Jews who feel strongly to have nothing to do with the protests... stay away and refrain from adding to the sufficiently heavy anxieties of the police. Any Jew guilty of lack of restraint is not a good friend of his people or of the principles he professes to hold.'<sup>28</sup>

This implicitly recognised that there *was* a case for Jews to feel strongly on this issue, but that the JC did not wish to grant this feeling any widespread communal legitimacy. The argument of not overburdening the police was important, in that it signified a particular attitude towards the state authorities, but it was clearly secondary in this case to the major ideological argument about the relationship of antisemitism to fascism, and whether Jews should oppose fascism *per se* as Jews.

As late as June 1936, the Council of Manchester and Salford Jews was being reminded by Nathan Laski JP, father of Neville Laski, the President of the BoD, that 'as long as the Jewish community are not attacked by fascists, the Jewish people have nothing to complain of'. By this time, however, the editorial line of the JC had begun to shift. In advance of this departure 'Watchman' had earlier argued that although he believed there was no necessary logical connection between fascism and antisemitism,

'Fascism practised on purely political lines may pose a question for the Jew as Jew, for it involves the suppression of political minorities, and when it comes to suppressing the political opinions of minorities, there is no way of saying in what other ways these groups might suffer. The whole system breathes a spirit of

intolerance and it may bode ill not only for the Jew but... for others similarly circumstanced.'<sup>29</sup>

The conviction that both fascists and Jewish opposition were equally responsible for an escalation of the danger, and that responsibility for defusing the situation lay principally with the conduct of Jews, gradually gave way to a more considered analysis which sought to isolate symptoms from causes. Whilst the physical reactions of Jews were still admonished as counter-productive, the ultimate responsibility was now ascribed primarily to the fascists. Considering the wisest course in response to antisemitic hooliganism, the JC suggested that rather than wait until public incitement resulted in physical assault, it was better to prevent men parading the streets and shouting abuse at Jews. This, it was reasoned, would 'strike at the cause rather than the consequences'. It did not mean that the prevailing advice to Jews would alter but it indicated that such advice was now bound more by political tact than by ideological preference.

The influences which facilitated this ideological shift were not only the insights offered by reporters and columnists combined with greater appreciation of the nature and extent of the antisemitic threat, for a powerful influence was exerted by the debate argued through the JC's correspondence column. By June 1936, the paper claimed that letters were 'pouring' in on the issue of antisemitism in Britain, and as far as space permitted it was printing a representative sample. The proponents of many different standpoints and interests in the community were represented in this debate. By far the most frequent subscribed to three common points: that there was a need for the Jewish community to create an independent defence organisation; that this need was absolutely urgent; and that this organisation should co-operate with other anti-fascist bodies. Underpinning this set of demands was an assumption that anti-semitism and fascism were inextricably linked and an assertion that they must be tackled together. A smaller number of letters lent general support to these points but remained cautious on the question of alliances. Some suggested that religious harmony provided the best common platform.

A further minority view was dismissive of conventional counter measures to antisemitism and sought to transcend the debate. This was the position put by 'Zionists', who argued that the best answer to the defamation of Jews was an assertion of Jews' constructive achievements in Palestine. These views, though peripheral to the major practical debate, are worth noting for their analysis of antisemitism and Jewry, in many

ways consonant with the views expressed earlier by the established leadership even though they prescribed different remedies. One Zionist correspondent believed that pro-Jewish propaganda could have a reverse effect, for antisemitism was 'a virus with a pathological complex that cannot be cured by rationality', whilst another argued that Jews in England suffered from an inferiority complex and that 'Englishmen will only respect the Jew who has the courage to link his identity with the future of the whole Jewish nation'. Such a response, which internalises and adopts the value system of the defamers of Jewry, was further illustrated by a correspondent who sought to dispute the patriotic claims of the BUF whilst proclaiming the true adherence of Jews in Britain to these values. He suggested the formation of a 'British League of Jews' which would adopt as its symbol a Union Jack with a Star of David superimposed.

The main public debate however focussed upon practical suggestions and in so doing challenged many of the assumptions and methods on which the communal leaders based their responses. It pointed up the widening gap within a community increasingly faced with a crisis of identity. The policy of dignified apathy was strongly attacked and one correspondent suggested that the 'inertia and over-caution of our so-called leaders . . . contributed directly to the fascist menace against the Jews'. This drew a response from Lazarus, a member of the Board, who argued that 'to create a belief that antisemitism is growing because of the Board's inactivity is to mislead the Jewish people'. He located the source of antisemitism in economic depression and national political setbacks, against which anti-alienism could take root, but he also believed the current efforts of Jewish leaders to be insufficient. He stated that attacks upon Jews must be answered and protests against antisemitic activities were imperative, but placed little faith in their current stock of pro-Jewish literature for it made 'good reading for our friends and those uninclined to harm us; it arms our friends but does not disarm our enemies'.

A recurring theme was the distance between those who had direct experience of the threat, and those who made pronouncements on its danger and sanctioned its responses. The notion that Jews should ignore Mosley and trust in the 'merits and innate decency of their fellow Englishmen . . . is defensive and humiliating' argued a correspondent who contrasted the feelings of security of Melchett and Laski, derived from their social and economic position with that of the Jewish worker. Another correspondent recounted how he had written to the BoD about Mosley's antisemitism three years earlier, and how they replied

that they did not consider it serious and no action was necessary.

'The position has now definitely reached a stage when action must be taken. I wonder how many of our leaders have even been to a Blackshirt meeting or have read *Blackshirt* or *Action*.'<sup>30</sup>

The arguments in favour of a defence organisation that would co-operate with like-minded bodies were coupled with a certainty that responses were required beyond denial of defamatory statements, recognising the necessity of combating the propagators of defamation rather than merely answering charges. It was being recognised that the process by which a party subscribing to fascist ideology came to use antisemitism was not random but was based upon logical and comprehensible factors.

As the debate continued, and the communal leadership deliberated, independent initiatives arose, intrinsic and extrinsic to Jewry, such as the British Union of Democrats, the Portsmouth Jewish Truth Society, the New World Fellowship, and the grandly named 'World Alliance for Combating Anti-semitism'. Jews in Hackney set up an organisation under the aegis of the National Party, to represent Jewish interests in the constituency and to counter antisemitic fascism. This brought a sharp response from the JC, which declared that this movement was unnecessary and dangerous because if Jews attached themselves to any particular party, then opposition parties would perforce become antagonistic to Jews. A Jewish Labour Council, based upon Jewish trade unionists, was formed in 1934 from a conference of the Workers Circle Friendly Society, which later played a major role in the formation of the Jewish People's Council.

On July 24th 1936 a relieved and encouraged JC enthusiastically declared 'Forward to Defence', for the BoD had just taken a major step in setting up the machinery through which it could more adequately respond to antisemitism in Britain. It created a Co-ordinating Committee to unify and direct its defence work, expanded the brief of the Press Committee and appointed a full-time executive officer to direct operations. The sole purpose of the body was anti-defamation. The circumstances within which this development occurred were considerably influenced not merely by continuing debate and initiatives but by a specific combination of factors, a central feature of which was a break in the consensus which had hitherto existed between the BoD and the JC. Previously united in a cautious and careful approach, increasingly the JC came to articulate and advance the urgent demands of its readers as expressed through its correspondence



columns. An Editorial in January 1936 entitled 'The Question of Self-Protection' acknowledged dissatisfaction and anxiety about the Board's failure to provide appropriate leadership on the defence question, and offered a reminder that 'The Board was made for the community, not the community for the Board'. A further Editorial, 'The Reply to Calumny' referred specifically to two letters it had received, from London and Leeds respectively, calling for vigorous action against anti-semitism. The JC categorically declared its lack of faith in the present defence structure, 'We have a lecture committee and a Press and Information Committee but nobody believes this penny-whistle piping is an effective response to antisemitic blasts'.

Meanwhile the BoD had been meeting and a new defence scheme was promised, but its appearance was delayed considerably as meetings were adjourned with few advances. Waley-Cohen, who was responsible for preparing the scheme, constantly appealed for patience and restraint; the JC warned that 'patience should not be stretched to breaking point'. The community, constantly stressing the urgency of the situation, clearly believed that the machinery could be assembled swiftly and without difficulty. The patience demanded by Waley-Cohen was indicative not of the lethargy which the Board's detractors accused, but of a different conception of the nature of the defence machinery to be established and its operative basis. Waley-Cohen justified his plea for patience thus:

'to ensure that the defence of Jewry in this country shall be worthy of its unique traditions . . . and so ordered as not to forfeit the smallest fraction of the good opinion of our friends and all of the best elements in the civilized world.'<sup>31</sup>

The pressure was sustained and as the Deputies prepared for their July meeting the JC claimed that there were strong grounds for believing that the Jewish leadership had been stirred by public opinion as expressed in its columns.

A major element was added as 'Watchman' wrote an article entitled 'The Question of Self-Defence' which both called for firm action and provided a powerful indictment of the current theory, practice and advice of the communal leadership. It attacked the public silence and private manoeuvring that had typified its responses, preferring indirect pressure on government departments to a publicly based campaign. This can be understood in terms of the requirements the leadership felt it must fulfil in order to ease its integration into British society.

Too much visibility, they feared, would lend credence to the notion of a Jewish problem. The paradox was that an invisible community was difficult to unify when the situation demanded a closing of ranks. Private activities had included leading Deputies requesting the JC to refrain from giving antisemites publicity, holding that such publicity was propaganda for them. The JC rejected the argument although, says 'Watchman', 'for a long time this journal refrained from noticing fascist 'carryings on'. This quietism did not appease the enemy and was only met with increased anti-Jewish activities'. He vehemently denied the utility of the oft-repeated advice to 'stay away' asking how it was possible

'to stay away from the chalking of offensive remarks on the pavement and walls of houses, the placards stuck on doors and people who go into shops and intimidate Jewish shopkeepers. Jewish pedestrians set upon by gangs of thugs would be only too glad to stay away.'<sup>32</sup>

Such criticism of the leadership found echoes among many non-elite members of the BoD, the most outspoken being Bertram Jacobs and M Turner-Samuels but they were given considerable support by representatives of the areas in which attacks upon Jews had been most concentrated. Upon the establishment of the new defence structures the JC offered four points of advice and warning. Firstly, as defence was now committed to the hands of a responsible body, unauthorised individual and group action should be abandoned; secondly, now the leaders have grasped the helm, the time for bringing up their past unsatisfactory record had gone; thirdly — aimed specifically at the Deputies — if they are to receive the confidence of the community, they must deserve it: 'let the deputies not fail and the community will not fail the deputies'; and fourthly, a plea to the community which had 'cried aloud for defence against its detractors'; it was now promised satisfaction, but the Defence Committee required the community's financial support.

The combination of a rapidly intensifying antisemitic threat, the strident demands among wide sections of the community for more adequate defence measures, the tentative growth of independent initiatives, and the growing dissent within its own ranks, compelled the Board to revise its defence policy and structure. The JC emerged as a significant catalyst in the process, channelling the urgent demands of the community towards definable policy steps, but it too was tarred with being

slow to recognise the seriousness of the situation until it was absolutely apparent. No sooner had the BoD established its independent Co-ordinating Committee than it was faced with a major rival representative organisation, the Jewish Peoples Council, and it was in the terms of the contrasting analyses and responses developed by these organisations that the debate upon Jewish communal responses to antisemitism continued.

**The Jewish Peoples Council Against Fascism and Antisemitism**

On July 26th 1936 a conference was convened under the auspices of the Jewish Labour Council, attended by 179 delegates representing 86 organisations, consisting of Workers Circle branches, trade unions, political organisations, friendly societies, synagogues, Zionist bodies, youth organisations, and ex-servicemen's organisations. They met on the basis of a shared conviction that there was a need for a strong and popular Jewish anti-fascist body that would be capable of taking the necessary practical steps for Jewish defence. They acknowledged that the established leadership of the community was assembling fresh defence structures, but they were unwilling to place their faith in the efficacy of these new steps, since they believed the BoD to be constituted on an obsolete basis and did not extend the franchise to the widest sections of the community. A 26-member delegate council emerged from the Conference and this was later constituted as the JPC. The central tenet of its analysis, which clearly distinguished it from the BoD, was its contention that antisemitism could not be separated from its political necessity to the fascist movement. The JPC characterised antisemitism as 'both a rallying cry and a smokescreen, thus hiding from the British people as a whole the true purpose of fascism'. It was understood primarily as a political instrument, but with an appeal rooted in economic conflict within the society in which it arose. Whilst recognising that its proponents were influenced by political developments abroad, its ability to gain some degree of mass support rested on home-grown roots. This characterisation of antisemitism had implications for the nature of responses to it and the formation of working alliances. The JPC argued that:

'The struggle against antisemitism is as much a task for the British people as a whole as for the Jews; and the struggle against fascism is a task for Jews as much as for the British people as a whole.'<sup>37</sup>

They therefore believed that it was impossible to combat antisemitism purely through anti-defamation work as this was

**JEWISH PEOPLE'S COUNCIL**  
 Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism  
 WILLESDEN BRANCH

**A PUBLIC MEETING**  
 TO FURTHER THE CAMPAIGN  
 AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

will be held at

**ST. GABRIEL'S HALL,**  
 Chichele Road, Cricklewood, N.W.2

on

**Monday, Nov. 30th, 1936**  
 at 8.30 p.m.

Speakers:

THE LORD BISHOP OF WILLESDEN  
 Dr. EDITH SUMMERSKILL  
 Miss MONICA WHATELEY  
 Professor H. LEVY  
 M. ORBACH, Esq.

Chairman: J. W. BENTLEY, Esq.  
 (Chairman of the Jewish People's Council)

*A poster advertises a JPC public meeting*

merely attacking the symptoms. They organised a campaign of public protest meetings — often open-air and close to BUF platforms; appeals to Parliament, particularly on the question of political uniforms and racial incitement; speakers to Jewish and non-Jewish organisations, and co-operation with other anti-fascist groups. A particularly strong co-operative relationship was established with the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL); they organised joint conferences and NCCL speakers regularly appeared on JPC platforms.

The intense flurry of activity which was set in motion prompted the formation of numerous other groups wishing to take practical steps in defence of the Jewish community. The Association of Friendly Societies organised speakers' classes with a view to holding open-air meetings. An ex-servicemen's movement against fascism was founded and within six weeks of its formation claimed a thousand members including seven



hundred Jews. In North-West London a rapidly growing Jewish Council of Action had been formed which took as its charter 'Watchman's' article on 'The Question of Defence'. It later merged with the JPC. These independent initiatives represented a diversity of approaches to Jewish defence, derived not only from diverse interests expressed in a wider collective framework, but also from strongly held analyses that represented some degree of incompatibility between different approaches. The JC voiced its concern: 'Such a multiplicity of bodies does not make for strength unless there is a clear understanding of the functions of each and harmonious co-operation'. It therefore called for unity in order to avoid a squandering and misdirection of energies. Alignments and co-operative working arrangements were made, but they did not result in one unified defence body. Instead the defence of British Jewry between 1936 and 1939 was led by two representative Jewish organisations: the Co-ordinating Committee of the BoD, and the JPC, subscribing to different analyses and developing different strategies.

The BoD was concerned solely with countering anti-Jewish defamation and would not embroil itself with the issue of fascism. This was for two reasons; firstly because it did not believe that there was any special relationship of fascism to antisemitism, and secondly because a position on fascism would involve the BoD in partisan politics. In this they were wholly supported by the JC which argued that it was dangerous for Jews to take a single collective attitude towards a legal political party since 'no other religious section takes up such a position towards a political party'. Furthermore, it argued, some Jews (such as Waley-Cohen) were not convinced that, apart from antisemitism, fascism was a deadly political error. The BoD method of countering antisemitic calumny was through leaflets, pamphlets and public meetings. Its leaflets and pamphlets, such as 'The Jews in Britain', 'Bolshevism is not Jewish', and 'What the Jews of Britain did in the Great War', concentrated on facts and figures, and extracts were periodically featured in display form in the JC. One such extract asked 'Do the Jews control British Finance?'. It then stated that there was not a single Jewish director of the Bank of England, that only three out of one hundred and fifty directors of the 'Big Five' banks were Jewish, and there were no Jews among the seventy to eighty directors of the other major clearing banks. This exemplified the exact weakness of the anti-defamation campaign: whilst its utility lay in its refutation of distorted or invented 'truths', by accepting that the argument may be reduced to numbers it conceded the underlying argument, and itself delegitimised the

role of Jews in Britain as equal citizens. Facts in themselves were not the basis of antipathy. This depended upon the attribution of relevance to these facts. Anti-defamation work blunted the antisemitic attack but did not challenge its real basis.

More than 1,500 people attended the BoD's inaugural open-air meeting at Hyde Park. Following its success, meetings were regularly held in recognised 'street corner' venues. These were organised in close co-operation with the Ex-Servicemen's Movement Against Fascism and the Association of Friendly Societies, the latter of whom, before embarking on its campaign of open-air meetings discussed principles with the BoD and submitted itself to the BoD's authority. Eventually, the BoD's campaign and that of the Friendly Societies were further co-ordinated under the auspices of the London Area Council (LAC) which set up an office in East London. The Friendly Societies, whose platform was non-political, were crucial to the BoD's campaign because they were drawn from the wider elements of the community, but shared the BoD's position on the nature of and response to antisemitism, as illustrated by their main speaker Frank Renton:

'Jew baiting is a contradiction of everything which Christianity has stood for. Jews are trustworthy . . . they have rendered illustrious service to Britain and the Empire. The overwhelming majority of Jews in Britain are sober, hardworking and with a social and moral standard as high as that of any other denomination.'<sup>34</sup>

Whilst the public actions of the BoD brought it closer to the reality of those Jews most exposed to attack, it did not alter its advice. It maintained that Jewry should abstain from Blackshirt meetings and demonstrations and that its behaviour should be impeccable, blameless and devoid of vulgarity and ostentation. 'If volatile Jewish youth stayed away' argued Laski, 'the charge that Jews are communists would soon be proved baseless.'

The JPC concentrated its efforts more selectively, combining general anti-defamation work with meetings for particular audiences such as trades councils, trade union branches, political organisations, and small traders. On the basis of its alternative analysis its message was in considerable contrast with that of the BoD. Its exposure of antisemitic calumny was placed within a framework directed towards unmasking the methods and motives of its propagators. Whilst the BoD reproached Jews with the antisemites' accusations of sweating employers, bad



landlords, and price-cutters, the JPC rejected the notion that these were particularly Jewish characteristics. Their advice to Jewry similarly contrasted with that of the BoD; it printed and distributed thousands of leaflets urging Jews to join public demonstrations against fascism and participated fully in the events of Cable Street. In the days immediately preceding that demonstration the JPC collected 100,000 signatures for a petition urging the Home Secretary to ban the march.

The significance of the JPC, consisted in its representation of the 'new community'. Zukerman noted the curious effect of the advance of fascism in relation to Anglo-Jewry. Instead of heralding greater unity in a critical period, it had given rise to a new division between the BoD and the JPC which threatened to become 'a wide and dangerous schism'. He located the source of that division in the social composition of the JPC, in that they represented those elements in the community largely unrepresented on the Board. This underlying problem was not confronted by the JC, which concentrated on pragmatic concerns for unity among a community under attack. It condemned the 'rival pretensions of the JPC' claiming that the latter's very title was misleading, for the BoD were the sole authoritative and representative body of Anglo-Jewry. The paper argued that it was not the task of the Jewish community to attack fascism as a political movement, only its antisemitic manifestations. The activities of the JPC were depicted as undermining the BoD and thereby weakening the community's hand. It was urged to 'loyally come into line with the recognised Anglo-Jewish authority'. The JPC rebutted the charges claiming that the BoD, which excluded from representation important sections of the community, did nothing in the face of fascist provocation but attacked those who did, and that it was the BoD who had rejected unity. The JPC felt unable to compromise on its central political argument, that antisemitism could not be divorced from the party that propagated it.

Through its practical day-to-day work the JPC continued to make inroads on the communal consciousness and understanding of antisemitism, and gradually the attacks on it diminished. It attracted the support of influential sections both within and external to Jewry, with leading churchmen, local politicians and respected ministers of Jewish religion speaking from its platforms. It received considerable support from the Jewish student movement, with individual Jewish student societies and their representative body the Inter-University Jewish Federation passing resolutions expressing indignation at the hostile attitude to the JPC displayed by the Board, and

offering its active assistance to the JPC campaign. The popularity of the JPC within the community was confirmed during the course of a Bazaar it held in December 1937 which attracted 3,360 people over eight evenings. Food was provided by Jewish bakers, whose union was affiliated to the JPC, and goods for stalls were donated by Jewish businesses.

Though winning adherents through its own extensive efforts, the JPC's arguments concerning the relationship between anti-semitism and fascism were increasingly confirmed by international events such as the Spanish civil war, the intensifying antisemitic terror in Nazi Germany and the increasing incidence of antisemitism in Italy from 1938. The latter undermined the distinction previously held by the communal leadership between the fascisms of Mussolini and Hitler. In Britain as the threat of war loomed the political articulation of a struggle between democracy and fascism was more generally accepted. The threat of international fascism undermined the communal leaders' assertion that the security of Jews in Britain was dependent solely upon successfully refuting antisemitic calumnies. As the JPC's thesis became more widely agreed, the JC ventured the suggestion that the LAC 'should not adopt too stiff and standoffish an approach to bodies doing similar work not represented on the Council'. As analyses converged the JPC offered to dissolve if agreement on its central argument could be reached. Such agreement ultimately could not be found but a degree of co-operation was reached which included exchanges of speakers. At a dinner and ball held in recognition of Jewish defence workers, to which the JPC were invited, Laski stressed 'We must emphasise that we are citizens on equal terms with citizens of other faiths in this country'. This was a significant reappraisal of the position of Jews for it demanded not *tolerance* but *acceptance*. The same sentiment was apparent in a full-page advertisement in the JC listing a set of meetings to counter the menace of antisemitism. 'Remember it is YOUR natural rights as Man and Citizen that are being assailed.'

In the interpretation of and responses to antisemitism some common ground had been found among the widest elements in the community. In the process the established leadership had conceded much to the JPC's analysis which had stood firm on its basic ideological foundations. But it was only towards the end of the decade, by which time the forces of organised anti-semitism were in decline, that this understanding was achieved. For most of the period the responses of the communal leadership were confined to combating the defamation of Jewry



without undertaking a thorough-going analysis of the roots of antisemitism in Britain. Its earlier notion that antisemitism was not a serious threat had been laid waste by the outcry emanating principally from members of the community most directly suffering its consequences. The responses offered reflected a particular set of beliefs about the nature of British society which was believed to be composed of a tolerant people fundamentally sympathetic to Jews, save those who were ignorant of Judaism or vulnerable to believing antisemitic calumnies when initially presented. Such prejudices were not considered to be deeply ingrained, and it was believed they could be eradicated through provision of accurate information. An anti-defamation campaign rests on the assumption that once its public has been presented with the facts, the case is discredited and dies. It discounts the possibility that there are material social forces at work which reproduce the basis on which an underlying ideology supporting defamation may flourish. A full recognition by the leaders of Anglo-Jewry of the nature of the political phenomenon with which it was confronted would however have placed serious obstacles to its efforts to secure integration within British society.

## Antisemitism, fascism and the state

The predominant character of antisemitism in Britain in the years following the first World War was that of a latent prejudice which intermittently gave rise to ostentatious individual outbursts. As such it rarely engaged the attention of the state authorities. By the mid 1930s, however, it had been profoundly transformed. Antisemitism was disseminated from street corner platforms to large audiences by an organised movement which made frequent use of public processions, held meetings and rallies in public property and sold its literature on public highways. It was a movement concerned far less with its internal development than its external display as it sought the widest possible popular adherence to its general goals. Faced with a formidable and wide-ranging onslaught, the Jewish community, after much initial hesitation, was compelled to respond in an equally public manner. The issue of antisemitic defamation and refutation increasingly acquired the character of a public confrontation and as such presented itself as an issue of law and order for the wider society. It demanded the involvement of the state authorities, particularly as the responses of the Jewish community became linked to demands upon these authorities to guarantee their protection. Antisemitism in Britain became a concern in Parliament, the Police and the Law Courts. In 1936 the Attorney-General initiated proceedings against Arnold Leese, the leader of the IFL who had published the ritual murder accusation. The court found him guilty of seditious libel and sentenced him to six months in prison. In the meantime, the Metropolitan Police were providing the front rank, authoritative presence between the public propagators and victims of antisemitism, and Parliament was discussing the steps it deemed necessary to contain and then remedy an increasingly critical situation.

It has been argued that the responses to Jewry to the threat of antisemitism in Britain in the 1930s reflected an understanding of its nature, bound up with a set of expectations of British society and the prescribed position of the Jews within it. These expectations were directly tested by the manner in which the state authorities related to the issue of antisemitism. Although the activities of the organised antisemites had been growing since the BUF's inception in 1932, it was not until 1936, when the Jewish community had begun to acknowledge the gravity of its circumstances and assemble what it considered the appropriate machinery to enable it to respond, that the



leaders of Anglo-Jewry engaged in a more public contact with state authorities. It had previously safely entrusted them with the task of ensuring the security of the community, but was now increasingly placing demands upon them. The communal leaders' earlier analysis of antisemitism was such that whilst they found individual incidents troubling, they did not believe there was undue reason for concern, and presumed that British institutions of justice, in which they placed great faith, would not disappoint them. Nevertheless in the earlier period the handling of antisemitic incidents, and the attitude towards Jews expressed by state authorities had occasionally caused disquiet. In 1932, concern was expressed when in various court cases the Jewish origin of a malefactor had been emphasised. A recorder in Leeds, for example, told a defendant, 'I have to deal with you as a Jewish receiver of stolen property'. As the activities of the BUF intensified, so the law courts increasingly presided over cases arising out of confrontation between Jews and fascists. The JC drew attention to a case in September 1935 in which a self-confessed fascist had been charged with unlawfully and maliciously inflicting grievous bodily harm with an iron bar upon a Jew. He was found guilty of common assault but merely bound over. The paper commented: 'The courts must act with greater sternness and efficiency . . . This case is not an isolated one'. From 1933, the police received many complaints from Jews of insults and assaults. It was felt that such incidents were not receiving the attention they merited. More specifically, from 1935 the police were increasingly accused of partiality between fascists and anti-fascists (who included many Jews). Often the police would ensure that fascist speakers were given a free rein and hecklers removed, and it was presumed that the police were acting on instructions from superiors. However, the general view expressed by the Jewish communal leaders was that despite instances in which the police or law courts may have shown leniency or partiality towards fascists, the community could nevertheless rest assured that it would be protected.

This view was undermined by events connected with the serious escalation of BUF actions, and the subsequent counter demonstrations they provoked. The matter became more frequently raised in Parliament, with local East End MPs playing a prominent part in demanding stronger measures from the Home Secretary to protect Jews. It was in the period from 1936 to 1938 that the issue of the reactions to antisemitism by the state came to the fore. Reviewing the year to September 1937 the JC drew attention to the 'many acts of violence not always suppressed with the vigour which the victims have a right to

expect from the police, whose apathy more than once gave rise to the suspicion that their traditional impartiality could not be relied upon'. In July 1938 the JC's special correspondent wrote that 'Jewish people are beginning to feel that the forces of law and order are against them'.

As a result of increasing concern expressed particularly by local politicians of areas under attack, a debate was held in the House of Commons on antisemitic terror in which a full summary of the range of incidents was read. The Home Secretary replied in his statement:

'I don't think there is any widespread feeling of hostility towards Jews in this country though it is undoubtedly the case in certain areas. In this country we will not tolerate Jew-baiting.'<sup>35</sup>

He spoke of the need to strengthen the hands of the police but regretted the difficulties of obtaining evidence. This related directly to the issue of police partiality, which was a widely expressed allegation in east London and appeared regularly in the accounts of meetings reported by the JC's special correspondent. The latter had pointed in particular to meetings where language of incitement and slander had been used whilst the police effectively acted as stewards for the BUF. At one such open-air meeting, the speaker had declared 'Blackshirts — at the Yids. Let us fight the dirty Yids and not let them get the upper hand'. At another, with a police note-taker on hand, the speaker declared 'Jews are venereal-ridden vagrants who spread disease to every corner of the earth'. The allegations of police partiality were in addition supported by local councillors and clergy in Bethnal Green and reflected reports in local newspapers.

The question of police attitudes was raised in Parliament by the MPs for Whitechapel and Hackney Central. The latter suggested that existing police actions had failed to prevent the growth of Jew-baiting and he alleged police partiality. Partiality was denied by the Home Secretary, and the JC felt that Parliament had taken serious note of the issue, but was conscious that many members were questioning whether the Home Secretary's was firm enough. Following large demonstrations in Finsbury Park, North London, Sir John Simon commented 'We have to take the difficulties of this being a free country into consideration and the best thing we can do is to appeal to everybody on all sides to behave reasonably'.

This applied a notion of symmetry that did not meet the case, but it reflected the dominant Government posture which understood the issue as a question of order, and this dictated



the limits of its responses. Reports of Blackshirt provocation and police protection continued to accumulate and the severity of the situation compelled a reappraisal by leading elements in the Jewish community of their attitude towards open political expression. The JC, having adopted a liberal position of absolute commitment to free speech, forcefully argued this position in condemning the early opposition activities of Jews to fascists, continually emphasising that it considered any interference with free speech as ultimately damaging to Jews' vital interests. But later it adopted a more selective attitude, urging the banning of fascist meetings in Jewish areas, and distinguishing between liberty and license.

In July, a more comprehensive parliamentary debate on the mounting terror in east London took place. Lasting five hours, it was filled with detailed reports of the physical, verbal and written attacks against Jews, the latter of which had included the blood libel published by the IFL. The paramilitary nature of the BUF was detailed and the question of political uniforms raised. The behaviour of the police was constantly referred to and once more Sir John Simon defended them against charges of partiality, citing a memorandum he had received from the President and Vice-President of the BoD repudiating such allegations; but the JC commented that they found his reply far from reassuring.

On October 4th the BUF's attempted march through the East End was blocked at Cable Street. Despite a massive police presence, the opposition was of such magnitude that the march had to be abandoned. In the wake of Cable Street and the violence which had followed it, the Government decided to act. The major areas on which public opinion had been crystallising were the desirability of banning provocative marches, measures to deal with racial incitement, and the banning of political uniforms. Deputations comprising London MPs, mayors and public workers reiterated the need for more resolute handling of the situation. Within three weeks a Public Order Bill was prepared. Nevertheless there were doubts about the rationale upon which the Government was preparing its counter measures, and the JC reprinted a warning from the *New Statesman* which cautioned: 'Government spokesmen have told us that the conflict in the East End is between two bands of equally responsible extremists. We hope the Government will not use the pretext for general restrictions on civil liberties'. This argument was echoed within the Jewish community by the JPC. This fear was not shared in the JC editorial which declared:

'The Government has been as good as its word and

the Public Order Bill . . . should at the very least impose a halt upon the subversive movement which has threatened the peace of the neighbourhoods and of Jews in particular.'<sup>36</sup>

It warned however that the efficacy of the Bill 'will depend in the last resort upon the determination and resolution with which its provisions are enforced'.

It was noted that no direct reference to antisemitism appeared but it was believed that this would be adequately covered in the clause relating to threatening and insulting behaviour. The degree to which the Bill would generally impinge upon civil liberties was a concern expressed most forcefully by the organisations which had been in the forefront of opposition to the BUF. On a JPC platform, Ronald Kydd of the NCCL argued that the Bill was not the Government's answer to the state of crisis which Mosley had created. The JC, whilst warning against the illusion that the Public Order Bill would signal the end of the Jewish community's worries, was, in contrast willing to concede the Government the benefit of the doubt on the issue of civil liberties.

The Public Order Act came into force on January 1st 1937. It banned political uniforms, gave extended powers to the police to restrict processions and considerably increased the maximum penalty for offences to the peace arising out of threatening, insulting or abusive behaviour. From forty shillings the maximum penalty was raised to fifty pounds and three months imprisonment. Laski welcomed the Act on behalf of the BoD describing it 'magnificent as a gesture of the almost united opinion of the British public that Mosley and his followers merely had nuisance value'. However, in the weeks during which the Bill was passing through its committee stages, the confidence of the East End Jewish community in the police was waning. The JC special correspondent identified 'a rising tide of East End suspicion'. Jews were 'beginning to feel they had no one on whom they could rely'. As the year of 1936 drew to a close he claimed that the police had consciously or unconsciously supported the fascists. Through their failure to check slanderous and inflammatory statements it was, he concluded, 'safer to be fascist than anti-fascist'. The brutality of stewards towards any expression of opposition at a BUF meeting in Hornsey in January 1937 compelled the Jewish communal leaders to take a more sober view of the Bill. The incidents were of such severity that comparisons were made with the notorious Olympia meeting, but for the Jewish community the most discomfiting feature was the apparent indifference of the police. The JC editorial



ventured 'to direct the Home Secretary's attention to our correspondent's statements. We do so in no irresponsible spirit and in no hostility to the police force'. The Hornsey occasion was followed by a series of open-air meetings where vituperative language, rather than being diminished by the strengthened clauses relating to insulting and threatening behaviour, increased in its virulence even in the presence of official police note-takers. The principles of English justice upon which the Jewish community had placed its faith were, noted the correspondent, being flagrantly disregarded. He asserted that 'the conduct of the police in Bethnal Green has every appearance of being pro-fascist and anti-Jew'.

The behaviour of the police in relation to antisemitic incitement raised acute problems for the Anglo-Jewish leadership, who had attempted, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, to claim that there was no foundation in the persistent allegation of police partiality. Its analysis, which rested initially on denying the existence of antisemitism and later on dismissing it as a foreign import, was grounded in a firm belief in the tolerant and just nature of British society and its institutions. It could explain the behaviour of local police partly in terms of their 'infection' by the 'disease' of antisemitism which was being so assiduously spread, but this was tempered by recognition that the police were not acting autonomously, and presumably under the orders of superiors who were regarded as immune from antisemitism. When Sir Philip Game, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, published his report for the year 1936 in which he claimed, 'numerous complaints were received from Jews of insults and assaults upon them but the great majority were unsubstantiated by any evidence upon which action could be taken', its position was further undermined. A trenchant JC editorial recorded how it had,

'never underrated the difficulty and the delicacy of the task with which the police were entrusted of maintaining order in the East End in the face of fascist Jew-baiting . . . nor have we been anxious to attribute to the police partiality towards the fascists even though the evidence is to the contrary . . . but we are compelled to ask whether his statement of lack of evidence still holds good.'<sup>37</sup>

Using the Hornsey meeting as its example, it concluded by enquiring whether the Public Order Act was 'a working reality or a pathetic illusion'.

In the meantime the courts were busy with many cases arising out of continuing confrontations, especially from street

meetings, and a number of antisemitic orators were charged under the new Public Order Act. However, there was little consistency in the actions of the authorities and whilst relatively mild speeches may have then been prosecuted, speeches of greater verbal virulence were frequently unheeded. Raven-Thomson who had been prominent in the BUF since its inception was charged in such a case. His numerous speeches in this period utilised all the stock phrases of antisemitic slander and incitement, but his particular case was dismissed because of 'no evidence of general insults to Jews'.

The demands made by the Jewish community for stronger action against the propagators of Jew-hatred were in part realised through quite extensive use of powers of re-routing or banning political processions. As a party based on action, the BUF suffered considerably, but its decline was in process before the intervention of the state. Nevertheless, the Public Order Act, which was seen to be primarily a response to the BUF, even if its implications were more widespread, had a negative effect on its political credibility from which it did not recover. The public abuse of Jewry, however, remained strong and continued to be disseminated. Moreover it continued to be revealed in quarters where its appearance stood in patent contradiction to the analysis of the authorities in Britain as advanced by the leaders of the Jewish community. In 1939 when the aliens scare had contributed to a more popular antisemitism, a number of court cases were marked by the antisemitic insinuations of magistrates. Two Jews in an assault case were told 'It's a pity you are both not in Germany. Go away and try the German High Court'. In the case of an antisemitic orator summonsed for insulting behaviour at a street meeting, the evidence of a Jewish witness was discounted by the magistrate, who repeatedly asked the latter why he did not walk away from the meeting. He dismissed the case. In a case involving two labourers, Israel Riscovitch, 32, and Stanley Philips, 26, charged with insulting words and behaviour, before imposing fines Magistrate Metcalfe remarked, 'I will not let a couple of young ruffians . . . especially with a name like Riscovitch behave in such a manner'.

The state authorities took measures on the basis of seeking to maintain order, which served to undermine the political credibility and general effectiveness of the major organised antisemitic movement. It did so at a cost to civil liberties which was deplored among others by the JPC, which was centrally involved in the defence of the Jewish community. It argued that through the Public Order Act, one fascist objective had been



achieved: suppression of the freedom to demonstrate. Furthermore they argued that had the police acted in an impartial manner, concentrating on checking provocation, slander and incitement, the Public Order Act would have been unnecessary. The JPC did not believe in the neutrality or assumed benevolence of the state and did not view the authorities as giving priority to the protection of the Jewish community from its defamers, particularly in their actions in response to the situation in the East End.

The practice of the law was inconsistent and offered no guarantees to Jewry that it would attain justice through the courts. Often magistrates defined the victims of antisemitic defamation as a problem in equal proportion to that of their defamers. Three Jews charged with insulting behaviour at a fascist meeting were told by the magistrate, 'You people complain of provocation by fascists and then you do this sort of thing. There is nothing to choose between you'. Jews were constantly advised, as their communal leaders had implored, to 'stay away', but as the JC special correspondent argued, 'a magistrate advises Jews to stay away from meetings but when insults and abuse are practically hurled by loudspeakers through windows at Jews, it hardly meets the case'.

The leaders of Anglo-Jewry retained their strong faith in 'British' justice throughout the period although recognising weaknesses in the law as it stood which did not attend to community libel. They nevertheless welcomed every partial statement of government commitment to Jewry's protection as generalised confirmation of the authorities' concern to ensure fair treatment for the community. Essentially, Laski and Waley-Cohen shared the state's dominant conception of the problem as one of order, in which antisemitic incitement was a major ingredient, and directed much of their energy in endeavouring to contain the opposition activities of Jews within channels which would not bring into question the attitude and behaviour of the authorities. To the community most directly threatened however the general question of order was rooted in the level of antisemitic incitement.

## Conclusion

The responses of Anglo-Jewry to antisemitism in Britain between 1932 and 1939 were developed in relation to a many-sided threat, pursued through a variety of forms based upon a broad set of ideological currents. It was principally propagated through the British Union of Fascists; a political movement whose elevation of the nation and state, and opposition to sectional interests, came to be realised through a progressively integral antisemitism. Most active between 1934 and 1937, they built upon and exploited an existing though uncrystallised antipathy towards Jews which was frequently manifested through a range of incidents and practices. The central ideological tenet underpinning the BUF's activities was the Jews constituted an alien and disruptive body engaging through corporate action in a set of machinations detrimental to the national interest. Increasingly elements of racial ideology were embraced and enhanced. Through a process of stereotyping, the original specific charges against individual or groups of Jews became more generally applied to Jewry. Simultaneously the elements in the ideology consistent with a generalised anti-alien stance gave way to a more particular attack on Jews, as Jews, which borrowed from historic and contemporary continental antisemitic mythology. Following the decline of the BUF, the impression of antisemitism remained and resurfaced forcibly in the 'aliens scare' of 1938-39.

Although attacked as a unified whole, the responses of the Jewish community to antisemitism in this period illustrates its heterogeneous nature and brought to the surface wider internal conflicts located in class, authority and representation, identity, prospects and aspirations. At the peak of antisemitic activity in 1936, when the urgent debate on defence measures dominated the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*, large sections of the community, rather than stand behind the established leadership, the Board of Deputies, lent their support to the Jewish Peoples Council which had more closely articulated their needs and demands. Between 1932 and 1935 Jews had been advised by their leaders to utilise regular channels of redress through the police, law courts and the press; but in response to the deteriorating situation, from 1936 the defence of the Jewish community was publicly based.

The BoD mounted a defence campaign which centred on anti-defamation and the provision of facts, figures and general information about Jewry for non-Jews, whilst appealing to Jews



to strive for impeccable and blameless public behaviour so as not to create or provide any justification for antisemitism. Such 'justification' was entirely superficial since it was contingent upon a stereotyping process by the defamers of Jewry, but it exemplified a response directed at the surface rather than the underlying basis of the problem. Fundamentally the BoD viewed antisemitism as a principally Jewish issue, though in responding to it participated alongside non-sectarian, non-political groups, whilst imploring Jews to abstain from political campaigns and forms of opposition activity. It believed that the information provided through its anti-defamation work would generally undermine the threat but it additionally made representations to the authorities for more lasting safeguards.

The campaign organised by the JPC, though engaged in anti-defamation, was more concerned with undermining causes rather than merely responding to symptoms, and it believed that the ideology of antisemitism could not be separated from its propagators. It saw an essential link between antisemitism and fascism and defined antisemitism as an issue of equal relevance to Jews and non-Jews. This was reflected in their co-operative relationships with like-minded bodies.

These different responses were based upon contrasting perceptions and divergent analyses of the nature and extent of the antisemitic threat. Initially the BoD's view of antisemitism was characterised by denial and dismissal. They denied that it could flourish in Britain and dismissed incidents as isolated events, until the patent reality of a vigorous antisemitic party demanded explanation. It was then characterised as a foreign import propagated by British individuals, motivated by political ambition and an irrational hatred of Jews, and finding support among individuals ignorant of Judaism, hence ignorant of Jews and opposed to them. The widespread and heterogeneous nature of the movement and its supporters and the readiness with which it was welcomed in particular areas rendered this explanation inadequate, and it was later combined with a self-critical outlook which saw the behaviour of Jews contributing significantly to the reproduction of antisemitism. The ideas at the core of antisemitism were understood as an attack on Judaism and on Jews as a religious group. In contrast the JPC believed that antisemitism had roots in the society in which it developed, that these were economic, and that they permitted its exploitation as a political instrument. It rejected the notion that Jews could be responsible for antisemitism, as this conceded the generalisation inherent in the antisemites' argument.

Underlying these contrasting responses were a set of ideas

about the nature of the Jewish community and its actual and desired position in relation to the wider society, as expressed respectively, through the organisations of the 'old community' and the 'new community'. Historical changes in the social structure and composition of the community involving its social, economic and cultural constitution provided the basis upon which these different reactions subsisted. The 'old community', still coveting their dominant position in Anglo-Jewry's representative institutions in the 1930s, conceived of itself essentially as a religious group, tolerated as guests in the host society. It was seeking to complete its successful integration into that society when it was confronted with the domestic growth of antisemitism. In order to give substance to the belief that it could successfully integrate, it developed a set of expectations about British society consistent with these aims. They revealed considerable uncertainty regarding the requirements to fulfil in order to facilitate the process of integration. The existence of a powerful antisemitic movement in Britain contradicted these expectations and explanations were sought by which it could preserve them. The confrontation with antisemitism exposed the changed reality of Anglo-Jewry and brought to the fore the existence of the 'new community', for it was they who were primarily bearing the brunt of the attack. Rather than being an assault upon the Jewish religion or the Jews as a religious group this was a many-sided assault upon Jews as a varied ethnic group. The communal leaders of Jewry derived their standing in the wider society from their authoritative position within the Jewish community. This position was endangered by the growth of an external threat which demanded a political rather than merely communal response. The appearance of a considerable political gap within Jewry would have undermined the hegemonic communal unity upon which they stood; so they attempted to develop a unified, specifically communal response.

The response to antisemitism whose central thrust was anti-defamation was consistent with an understanding of antisemitism informed by the self-image of an optimistic and secure community within a tolerant and fair-minded society. The more encompassing responses of the 'new community' were consistent with the comprehension of antisemitism as a domestic product operating against a vulnerable minority. It rested on an evaluation of British society and a self-image that formed a closer reflection of the reality of Anglo-Jewry in the 1930s.



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