ABSTRACT

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The British Political Press and Italian Fascism
(Under the Direction of Dr. Kirk Willis)

Juxtaposing Mussolini's Italy with Britain's struggle to comprehend the chaos of the Interwar period lends readers a fresh understanding the interwar period. In particular, isolating the actions of fascist Italy against the British political press' reaction unveils a unique perspective on the path to the Second World War. In addition, this grappling with fascism abroad reveals the confusion penetrating the political and social landscape at home. Furthermore, an exclusive investigation of the British political press and Italian fascism remains absent in the literature of this much-studied period. Many historians touch on this relationship in their work on British fascism and British foreign policy while others have investigated the relationship between Britain and German fascism of this same period. Though these works are an invaluable asset to this study in terms of consolidation, an exclusive look at the British responses to Mussolini's Italy is essential in providing a fresh perspective. As the bewildered Brits waded through fascism's improvised ideology, the political atmosphere of delusion surfaced. By summer of 1938, the press vocalized their apprehension about the British government's management of the fascist dictators, particularly Mussolini. With the British press' response as a backdrop, this chronological structure illustrates the evolution of confusion into a policy of appeasement. Amidst media protest, the British government practiced appeasement long before it ever had a name.

INDEX WORDS: British political press, Italian fascism, Appeasement policy, Mussolini, Italian dictatorship, British foreign policy

THE BRITISH POLITICAL PRESS AND ITALIAN FASCISM

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother, for teaching me to appreciate every blade of grass. To my father, for teaching me to hoop jump with purpose and humor.

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I would like to thank Dr. Willis for his thoughtful guidance, unending patience, and for keeping me sane. I would like to thank Dr. Roberts for his expertise and insight. Without their combined knowledge of British history and Italian fascism, this project would have been impossible.

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INTRODUCTION

Walking along the crooked streets of London, Glasgow, or Birmingham in 1939, travelers heard a popular jingle echoing throughout Great Britain: "Whistle while you work, Mussolini made a shirt, Hitler wore it, Chamberlain tore it, Whistle while you work. . . ."[1] This simple tune was pregnant with meaning to the careful ear. Seemingly, the Munich crisis had pervaded the popular psyche. More importantly, this song expresses the complexities of the interwar period as Great Britain grappled with the emergence and consequences of fascism on the continent. Samuel Hynes notes that "intellectual error, false hopes, delusion, and dishonesty"[2] riddled the political atmosphere of interwar Great Britain. As evidenced by this tune, turmoil invaded the consciousness of the British people. On the eve of 1939, they awoke to the emptiness of appeasement and the reality of fascism. By maintaining an aggressive foreign policy, European fascism ultimately dispelled the ambiguity swirling through the British Isles.

Juxtaposing Mussolini's Italy with Britain's struggle to comprehend the chaos of the interwar period lends readers a fresh understanding of this awakening. In particular, tracing the actions of fascist Italy against the reaction of the political press in Britain unveils a unique perspective on the path to the Second World War. Accordingly, this analysis reveals the diversity of ideological voices within the British press similarly consumed with defining and evaluating Italian fascism. Furthermore, this grappling with fascism abroad reveals the "delusion" and

[1] Norman Page, *The Thirties in Britain* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd, 1990) , 14.
[2] Ibid. , 15.

confusion penetrating the political and social landscape at home.[3] Evidently, the residual chaos of the First World War pervaded the European continent as well as the British Isles.

Therefore, spanning most of the interwar period, this study opens with embryonic fascism in Europe and concludes with European fascism as a matured, aggressive, multi-state movement. Primarily tracing these events in *The Times*, *The Spectator*, *The New Statesman*, and *The Economist*, the analysis relies on reports released by the British government to the press, compiled by correspondents located in Rome and Milan, and written by feature writers sent to Italy. By the late 1930s, most of these publications employed British or Italian correspondents in Italy to cover the movement. *The Times* hired both British and Italian journalists in multiple cities throughout the interwar period. The weeklies often published pieces by British citizens who had lived in Italy before the March on Rome and offered an informed perspective of fascism's impact on the people. Considering Mussolini's unrelenting grip restraining the Italian press, obtaining accurate coverage of events in Italy for the British papers remained a challenge throughout the period.

Considering Mussolini himself was improvising with the definition and practice of fascism, an understandable confusion pervaded the early media response. Consequently, disapproval from the press remained fairly hushed or infrequent until the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Suddenly, the international implications of fascism emerged as the potency of the League of Nations evaporated. By 1936, Hitler and Mussolini flagrantly poured men and munitions into Spain bolstering Franco's grab for power. As the fascist bloc strengthened on the continent, the political press in Britain, regardless of their stance on non-intervention, acknowledged the growing fascist threat. As the bewildered Brits waded through fascism's

[3] Ibid.

improvised ideology, the political atmosphere of "intellectual error, false hopes, delusion, and dishonesty" surfaced. By summer of 1938, the press vocalized their apprehension about the British government's management of the fascist dictators, particularly Mussolini. With the British press' response as a backdrop, this chronological structure illustrates the evolution of confusion into a policy of appeasement. Amidst media protest, the British government practiced appeasement long before it ever had a name.

PART I: OCTOBER 1922 TO AUGUST 1924

In August 1923, *The Star* published David Low's first political cartoon featuring Benito Mussolini. Low sketched a wild-eyed Mussolini pounding on a cymbal of war outside "Dottyville for War Nuisances Past and Present."[4] Beside the Duce, Low placed a bottle of castor oil, with which the Blackshirts infamously tortured their political enemies.[5] As an early critic of Mussolini and Italian fascism, Low found himself unaccompanied by the mainstream British press. Instead, the British papers, all across the political spectrum, oozed with obvious confusion and rickety optimism. However, before the fascist takeover, Italy's inefficient parliamentary system fumbled in the political and economic chaos of the post-war period. In 1919, after shedding his socialist beginnings, Mussolini established the Fascist Party in Italy. At the time, fascism suited the discontented atmosphere in Italy; the party harped on middle-class fears of socialism and post-war resentment. In October 1922, Mussolini and his party leaders, relying on this growing disaffection, arranged a large gathering of Blackshirts outside Rome. King Victor Emmanuel III, instead of calling the military to arms, invited Mussolini to form a government. As the new Prime Minister, Mussolini, followed by his loyal fascist squads, paraded into Rome announcing the fascist victory, which propaganda artists christened as the March on Rome.[6] On October 31, Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law and Prime Minister Mussolini exchanged formal pleasantries by telegram, which emphasized the legitimacy of Mussolini's

[4] *The Star*, 31 August 1923. in http://opal.kent.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=0&search=David%20low%20Mussolini (accessed February 17, 2009).
[5] Ibid.
[6] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/508871/March-on-Rome; accessed April 21, 2009.

fascist government.[7] However, less formally, the British government responded to "the first fascist regime" as contributing great "unpredictability and uncertainty to European affairs."[8]

Recalling the British media response, the historian Charles Keserich suggests that the political left's early and consistent opposition to Mussolini is a commonly held misconception.[9] Rather, he argues that in the early 1930s the British left "treated Mussolini's regime uncertainly, confusedly, and often indulgently."[10] The pervasive confusion is understandable considering Mussolini was improvising with embryonic fascism in the mid 1920s. However, the press's apologetic attitude towards Mussolini's fascism remains rather knotty. This indulgence that Keserich notes foreshadows the cautious stance the British press and government maintained towards Mussolini's Italy until the 1930s. In a sense, the media reaction to the March on Rome conditioned the appeasement Britain applied in its future dealings with European fascism. Simply, cautious confusion reigned.

As Fascismo usurped political power, the British blindly grappled with the events in Rome in late October. The mainstream press attempted to define the Fascisti and their aims in terms of class. *The Times* and *The Spectator* readily defined fascism as a reaction to the spread of Bolshevism in Italy. Since the Bolshevik Revolution, the British press compulsively eyed the goings on in the Soviet Union. As the Italian government sat idly watching, socialism found a haven in the chaos of post-war Italy frustrating bourgeois industrialists. As *The New Statesman* explained, "Something of a quarter of the country was under the Red Flag" in 1922.[11]

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[7] *The Times*, 1 November 1922.
[8] Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 67.
[9] Charles Keserich, "The British Labour Press and Italian Fascism, 1922-25," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, no. 4 (1975): 579, in Academic Search Complete [database on-line], JSTOR, GALILEO, http://www.jstor.org/stable/260102 (accessed September 9, 2008).
[10] Ibid.
[11] *The New Statesman*, 11 November 1922.

Considering that Bolshevik threat consumed the British mentality in the early 1920s, the reasoning behind the conservative papers' restrained criticism of Mussolini becomes less hazy. Apparently, anything was better than Bolshevism.

Though the press wholeheartedly deemed the fascist takeover a class movement, they bickered over which class Mussolini represented. *The Times* reasoned that fascism "may ultimately develop into a party of middle-class, working-class, and peasant conservatives. . ."[12] *The New Statesman* suggested that the fascists remained the "White Guard of the propertied classes" but noted that the movement was "predominantly working class in membership."[13] *The Spectator* resolved that working class thugs sustained the power of the Party, and the bourgeoisie joined only under the threat of force.[14] In addition, the paper noted that the movement was "a class warfare expressed in terms of national ambition."[15] *The Economist* suggested that the Fascisti were a "purely bourgeois party" and mainly "agricultural."[16] Clearly, Mussolini's lower class militants were an undeniable and necessary factor in the success of the governmental takeover, yet the press seemingly disagreed on the party's overall relationship with capitalism. To explain the confusion, *The New Statesman* admitted that the goals of the fascists were unclear, but the paper noted "the reason, evidently enough, is that they have no program."[17] Importantly, this Labour mouth-piece, like much of the left wing press that Keserich mentions, emphasized Mussolini's socialist past and desired the maintenance of his "many Socialist views."[18] As Bolshevik fears necessitated the support of centrist papers, Mussolini's former

[12] *The Times*, 30 October 1922.
[13] *The New Statesmen*, 28 October 1922.
[14] *The Spectator*, 4 November 1922.
[15] Ibid.
[16] *The Economist*, 4 November 1922.
[17] *The New Statesmen*, 28 October 1922.
[18] Ibid.

membership in the Socialist party comforted the left wing press. They trusted that fascism would not "be the defender of the interests of Capitalism" and would align with the Trade Unions, if not the Socialists.[19]

In addition to economic optimism, the press anticipated improvements in the administrative sector. Speaking for the left, *The New Statesman* declared that revolution in Italy "could not well have taken a more hopeful form."[20] The center to right leaning papers also agreed that Mussolini's fascist revolution would enhance overall government efficiency. However, *The Times* and *The Spectator* recognized that fascism's legitimacy depended on a cessation of the violence. For several days after the March on Rome, *The Times* detailed the pervasive brutality that had delivered political power to the fascists but continued to undermine the legal authority of the new government. For example, the paper noted that some of the "15,000 warriors" of fascism killed seven civilians in the San Lorenzo quarter after the initial March on Rome.[21] Additionally, these Blackshirts invaded the offices of several anti-fascist newspapers in Rome and "burned some hundreds of copies on the Piazza Barberini."[22] Flirting with criticism in an editorial titled "Nemesis of Communism," *The Spectator*, a conservative paper, derided Mussolini for "terrorizing" the Italian press.[23] Additionally, the paper declared that "Fascismo means unconstitutional action" and noted that local fascists "beat the magistrates who gave decisions against them" while forcing "officials who were obnoxious to them to resign

[19] Ibid & 11 November 1922.
[20] *The New Statesman*, 11 November 1922.
[21] *The Times*, 1 November 1922.
[22] Ibid, 31 October 1922.
[23] *The Spectator*, 4 November 1922.

under threat of death."[24] *The New Statesman*, in all its optimism, failed to mention this Blackshirt violence in its initial review of fascism.

Though *The Times* and *The Spectator* criticized Mussolini's violence, they generally "trust[ed] that the triumph of Fascismo will, after all, do no great harm."[25] After noting the abolition of the freedom of the press and the arbitrary slaughter of café patrons, the papers suggested that immediate dispersal of the fascist thugs would absolve the regime. Therefore, *The Times* urged Mussolini to disband the Blackshirts.[26] Similarly, *The Spectator* exploited the opportunity to criticize Mussolini's "Direct Action" to draw a parallel with the actions of the Labour Party.[27] To make this comparison, the paper suggested, "Whenever a minority seizes power in the name of the people that minority turns into an instrument of tyranny."[28] However, contradicting this definitive conclusion, the paper noted that "the motives" of fascism "will lead [Italy] to a just and impartial rule in the end."[29] Only guarded criticism and blind optimism logically resolves that an instrument of tyranny generates a just rule.

The British media's response to the March on Rome seemingly set the indulgent, apologetic standard. Though the actual March was "bloodless," the revolution's history maintained a violent record. Seemingly, contradictions riddled Fascismo and the subsequent foreign interpretations of the movement. Even while noting Parliament's dangerous relinquishment of power to the Executive in the Bill of Full Powers in December 1922, *The Economist* reasoned that the Italian people rightly yearned for an end to the "old system and its

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] *The Times*, 1 November 1922.
[27] *The Spectator*, 4 November 1922.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

inefficiency."[30] Consequently, the weekly described Mussolini's fascist regime as "another set of politicians, young, energetic, full of vigour and of patriotism."[31] The strangeness of this interpretation lies in *The Economist*'s inability to recognize the imminent collapse of the parliamentary system under fascism, when in fact this was the very fear substantiating the Bolshevik threat. Therefore, though the facts and details appear relatively damning, the British press found a very silver lining to the fascist revolution in Italy. In fact, more worrisome than the terrorization of the press or the dependence on thuggish brutality, the mainstream press united to mock Mussolini for failing to own a top hat for his meeting with King Emmanuel.[32] In shock, the press giggled over this tiny mishap, poking fun at Mussolini's rough background. Their guarded criticism failed to restrain them from indulging in a moment of English humor.

After the fuss surrounding the March on Rome dissipated, Italy strayed from the British consciousness, popping up occasionally as minor news. However, an Italian sent a letter to the editor of *The Spectator* criticizing the weekly's benevolent treatment of Mussolini. The letter, titled "An Italian Protest," accused the editor of glorifying Mussolini "as the savior of his country – whereas he is more like to be the ruin."[33] Furthermore, the Italian commented on the pro-fascist stance many British papers like *The Spectator* provided for foreign readers.[34] He included a story about his daughter, who was slapped by another Italian child simply for stating that she was not a fascist.[35] He encouraged the British press to look beyond the new sense of order in Italy and see that "[t]he road is only for the Fascisti."[36] This letter demonstrates that the

[30] *The Economist*, 2 December 1922.
[31] Ibid.
[32] *The Times*, 1 November 1922 & *The Spectator*, 4 November 1922.
[33] *The Spectator*, 31 May 1924.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

British press' indulgent position frustrated some contemporary Italians struggling with the reality of fascism. Evidently, the mainstream press continued to exclude or deemphasize certain pieces and sustain their optimistic perspective of fascism in Italy. Unfortunately, this Italian must have been unaware of David Low's cartoons, for a few months later Low published another tongue-in-cheek jab at the Italian state in *The Daily News*. His sketch, detailing the Political Olympic Games, featured France, Italy and Britain.[37] He suggested the Italian athlete "ha[d] trouble with his long jump" and landed in an embarrassing heap otherwise labeled "The Matteotti Affair."[38] In fact, an embarrassing heap is an appropriate analogy for what became of this political blunder in the summer of 1924.

On the 10th of June 1924, Giacomo Matteotti, a prominent member of the Italian Socialist Party, disappeared on his walk to purchase a pack of cigarettes.[39] Witnesses later claimed that five men abducted the deputy, threw him into a car, and drove away from the site.[40] After a widespread search of the area, authorities found his corpse outside Rome.[41] Within days, twenty-five members of the Fascist Party were arrested and charged with participation in the murder.[42] Before his abduction, Matteotti engaged in a public debate implicating fascist corruption in governmental and election matters.[43] Therefore, the Government and public opinion labeled the murder as a brutal silencing of a sharp critic of the regime. Suddenly, after little press attention in the two preceding years, the Italian fascists found themselves back on the international stage. The British press clamored to gather any information on the Matteotti affair, printing regular

[37] *The Daily News*, 12 July 1924 in http://opal.kent.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=7&search=David%20Low%20June%201924; accessed February 17, 2009.
[38] Ibid.
[39] *The Times*, 19 June 1924.
[40] http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,729080,00.html (accessed February 17, 2009).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] *The Times*, 12 June 1924.

updates on the growing number of arrests within the Fascist party. Though violence was essential to the establishment of Italian fascism, the British press appeared astonished that this violence still sustained the movement. For the moment, Mussolini's fascism faltered.

On the 8th of June, Mussolini delivered a promising speech reinforcing the power of Parliament while encouraging multi-party cooperation.[44] *The Times* even suggested that "It was the speech of a democratic leader, basing his power on an enumeration of the votes cast in his favour. . ."[45] After the silencing of Matteotti, the message of this speech, in retrospect, appears rather flimsy, and it seems the British press could no longer venerate Mussolini and disregard his thugs. With the exception of *The New Statesman*, the mainstream British press instead regarded the murder with cautious confusion, absolving Mussolini while condemning the violence. Therefore, *The Times*, *The Spectator*, and *The Economist* interpreted the Matteotti Affair in three ways.

First, these papers painted Mussolini as a victim. Simultaneously, they bemoaned the inexplicable and ghastly timing of the murder just as Mussolini was "round[ing] a different curve back to a system of government in which constitutional forms shall count for more than a single personality."[46] Instead of stamping his speech as void, they lamented the effect of the actions of a few lowly members on the "democratic leader."[47] (Even though as the days passed, the chief of the Press Bureau and the managing secretary were arrested for their direct involvement, demonstrating that these actions were not just perpetrated by the lowly.) *The Times* went so far as to print that "Popular opinion is notoriously not judicial, and nothing is more unfair or more sad than that Signor Mussolini on the morning of his most serious attempt at conciliation should

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] *The Spectator*, 21 June 1924.
[47] *The Times*, 12 June 1924.

have suffered from so severe a blow to the honour of his nation and the prestige of his party."[48] This commentary reinforces the observation that the center to right press staunchly supported Mussolini and carefully isolated him from the illegal actions of his own party. *The Economist*, for example, clarified that by covering this scandal the writers had no "wish to belittle the contribution which his regime ha[d] made to the restoration of more efficient administration and economic improvement in Italy."[49] Consequently, these collective interpretations constructed an image of Mussolini as a savior foiled by the actions of "extremists and dissidents."[50]

Second, these papers portrayed Mussolini as wholly innocent. For example, *The Times* noted that this murder occurred "assuredly without the knowledge or assent" of Signor Mussolini.[51] Similarly, *The Economist* mentioned that "No one could for one moment suggest that the dictator himself has had a hand in this dastardly affair."[52] Only Mussolini's denial and the press' blind faith in his intentions pointed to the Duce's innocence in the matter. Consequently, Mussolini became a paragon of justice dolling out proper punishments regardless of political affiliation. *The Times* suggested that Mussolini would not "allow the barbarities of interested miscreants to interfere with his work for Italy."[53] Therefore, as the arrests accrued, this paper applauded Mussolini for delivering "Italy in this case the justice without fear or favour which with one voice she demands."[54] Overall, readers back in Britain generally understood that Mussolini was "showing a courageous determination to probe the crime…"[55] Not one of these

[48] *The Times*, 19 June 1924.
[49] *The Economist*, 21 June 1924.
[50] *The Spectator*, 24 June 1924.
[51] *The Times*, 21 June, 1924.
[52] *The Economist*, 21 June, 1924.
[53] *The Times*, 19 June 1924.
[54] *The Times*, 21 June 1924.
[55] *The Economist*, 21 June 1924.

papers dared suggest that Mussolini had any knowledge of Matteotti's impending death, which remains somewhat bizarre given his rise on the wave of violent intimidation.

Finally and most significantly, these three papers unintentionally suggested that Mussolini was relatively powerless by clamoring to his defense. For example, *The Economist* explained the affair as a consequence of "the violence by which he had risen to power [that] had passed beyond his control."[56] Additionally, while describing the recent rise in Italian dissent, *The Times* noted that the Italian papers were "expressing themselves with a frankness never before shown since the advent of the fascist regime."[57] Not only was Matteotti's murder "beyond [Mussolini's] control," but the press, which he had so tightly regulated, found a renewed voice echoing that of the frustrated people. This explanation implied that Mussolini seemed to be losing his totalitarian grip on Italy. Furthermore, *The Times* reinforced this theory by publishing articles detailing the outbreak of fascist violence in Rome and Northern Italy in the days after the murder. As "Rome [was] swarming with Blackshirts," "bands of fascisti" thronged the streets of Milan "terrorizing and assaulting" innocent bystanders.[58] They even "ransacked the home of Constitutional Liberal Senator Frassati."[59] *The Times* admitted Mussolini "ha[d] himself provoked this nemesis" by encouraging the brutality as a means to power.[60] Mussolini's inability to control his own forces evidenced his declining authority. Nonetheless, amidst political embarrassment and uncontrollable violence, *The Times*, *The Spectator*, and *The Economist* trusted that he still "maintained the confidence of the people" and hoped for his ultimate victory

[56] Ibid.
[57] *The Times*, 21 June 1924.
[58] Ibid. , 24 June 1924.
[59] *The Times*, 24 June 1924.
[60] *The Times*, 21 June 1924.

of "restoring peace."[61] Even though two years had passed and the violence persisted, these papers clung to desperate rhetoric.

As the rest of the mainstream press grappled with Mussolini's guiltless role in the murder, *The New Statesman* printed its first editorial that can be described as critical in June 1924. Responding to the multiple notions floating around Britain, this Socialist weekly attacked Mussolini while puncturing the power of the apologetic papers. Referring to a speech given during the previous year, *The New Statesman* reported that Mussolini had declared that "That which happens, happens by my precise and direct will."[62] Based upon this tenet of fascism, if Mussolini had no involvement in the Matteotti Affair, "he ha[d] failed to enforce his precise and direct will" and was "no longer able to control the lawless forces which he created, which raised him to power."[63] Ultimately, whether or not he directly ordered the murder remained moot because "he [was] a criminal or else he [was] a Dictator who [could] not dictate even to his own irregular Fascist forces."[64] Molding Mussolini into a dangerous dictator or corrupt criminal, *The New Statesman* stripped the defense of any substantial validity. Finally, the weekly noted that Mussolini's dictatorship "depend[ed] utterly upon the maintenance of an illusion," and the Matteotti Affair forced the Party "to compromise" its absolute authority dispelling the illusion.[65] Consequently, Mussolini would "prick the gloriously coloured bubble upon which he ha[d] balanced himself."[66] In other words, *The New Statesman* anticipated a fascist collapse.

Regardless of politics, the British press genuinely hoped that Mussolini would forego the violence inherent in his fascist party and move towards democracy. His speech in

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[61] *The Times*, 28 June 1924 & *The Spectator*, 21 June 1924.
[62] *The New Statesman*, 21 June 1924.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

early June seemed to reward the optimism much of the press had maintained since the March on Rome. However, the Matteotti murder shook the foundations of this optimism, inviting the first critical and pessimistic editorial in the mainstream British press. And yet, this editorial continued to regard fascism as non-threatening, as just straddling the line between instability and disintegration. Meanwhile, much of the press remained optimistic, buying into Mussolini's purely innocent image. Though the true nature of Mussolini's involvement in the Matteotti Affair remains hazy even today, the political blunder brought Italy back into British consciousness in a negative light. The attention given to the incident in Britain surprised the Italian fascists prompting the *Tribuna* to print a cartoon featuring Mr. MacDonald hiding a heap of Irish bodies killed by British soldiers.[67] The caption read, "They have killed a Deputy in Italy; I protest!"[68] However, the year was 1924, and the British were preoccupied with the happenings in the Soviet Union. Mussolini manhandled the press back under his control and maintained power in Italy. On January 3rd, 1925, Mussolini delivered a speech before the Chamber accepting full responsibility for the violence. However, he articulated that this acceptance signified the dawn of a new regime wholly totalitarian and unreservedly opposed to further collaboration. This moment signaled the death of the parliamentary system in Italy and the establishment of a fascist dictatorship. However, news of Italy again disappeared from the general British perception. And as attributed to Franco Zeffirelli, to most Europeans Mussolini returned to being "the gentleman who makes the trains run on time."[69]

[67] *The Times*, 27 June 1924.
[68] Ibid.
[69] *Tea with Mussolini*, DVD, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (Rome: G2Films/Cattleya, 1999).

PART II: JANUARY 1925 TO FEBRUARY 1929

In February 1926, David Low published a valentine featuring Mussolini or as he so endearingly labeled him, "Mussolooney."[70] This sketch featured the Italian dictator brandishing a dagger and escaping over the brick walls of "The Fascist Madhouse."[71] Equipped with a receding hairline and an unshaven face, the crazed Duce threatened his potential valentine declaring, "You let-a me be your-a valentine-a or I stick-a you."[72] Though Low's criticism of Mussolini preceded most of the mainstream press, the rest of the British papers quite suddenly discovered a deep sense of disapproval early in 1925. Coverage of the Matteotti Affair had diminished and mentions of the Italians remained infrequent throughout the rest of 1924, and yet criticism of Mussolini and his fascism flourished in the New Year. David Low no longer remained the lone British critic of Mussolini. Apparently, three years of continued fascist brutality, with no end in sight, slapped the conscience of the British press into an expression of disapproval. However, the press did not see Mussolini's fascism as a growing and violent threat to the European balance of power. Instead, these new critics fell into ranks with *The New Statesman*, asserting that the fascist fad had floundered. This almost impulsive proliferation of criticism was a derivative of three fascist practices: continued aggression, rejection of constitutionalism, and suppression of the press.

The Matteotti Affair, in the summer of 1924, forced the British press to condemn the violence inherent in the fascist regime, yet the papers supplemented their condemnation with

[70] The Star, 13 February 1926 in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=7&search=David%20Low%20%20Mussolini
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

optimistic undertones predicting a cessation of brutality. However, six months later, the violence continued to flourish and maintain the regime's power. In January, *The Spectator* included a brief statement detailing the "very severe outbreak of Fascist violence at Pisa."[73] Leading the foreign news section, an article in *The Times*, titled "Fascists and Crime," reported that a local fascist unit had invaded the home of communist peasants and killed one man.[74] The fascist jury found the perpetrator innocent of all charges in a sham of a trial, as implied by *The Times*.[75] The article also included the new Secretary General of the Party's comment that, even if the man had been guilty, the jury had acted properly in not "confounding an episode of our revolution with a vulgar, common crime."[76] Six months previously, the Party had at least feigned disapproval and apology after the Matteotti murder and other embarrassing acts of violence. However, in the more stable political atmosphere of 1925, the Fascists maintained no qualms about expressing the necessity of violence in their revolution. In fact, in a speech given in December and partially published by *The Spectator*, Mussolini confirmed that "he had always advocated a 'surgical, intelligent, and chivalrous violence,'" implying that he disapproved of Matteotti's murder but that some political murders, such as that of the communist peasant, may be necessary.[77] By juxtaposing these shocking admittances with the coverage of continued violence, *The Times* and *The Spectator* indicated their disapproval of the Party's handling and encouragement of fascist brutality.

With these admissions, the British press began to acknowledge the purposeful relationship between fascism and crime in Italy. However, in addition to criminal violence, *The*

[73] *The Spectator*, 17 January 1925.
[74] *The Times*, 9 March 1925.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] *The Spectator*, 10 January 1925.

Times also covered the development of the Italian military forces with regular updates. In early March, for example, the paper printed a summation of Signor Filippo Marinetti's speech entitled "Aggressiveness for Babes."[78] Espousing his ambitions for the Italian Empire, Marinetti explained that Italians should focus on "war and conquest."[79] Furthermore, he urged "the Italian race" to prepare "to seize all the lands and all raw materials indispensable to its future greatness." Though *The Times* included the brief article at the very bottom of the foreign news section, any published acknowledgement of Italian international aspirations remained very rare in these early years. The writer did not comment on Marinetti's speech, so the intention behind the article or, perhaps more properly, the snippet remains unclear. However, in March and April, *The Times* included three installments updating the British public on the augmentation of Italian military forces. First, they reported on the Bill on Italian Army Reform, which detailed the inadequate state of Italian defenses.[80] Second, in a piece at the beginning of the international news coverage, the paper explained that the legislature was reconsidering the Army Reform Bill because Party members remained vehement that Italy required enhanced military strength.[81] Third, *The Times* covered the creation of the Italian air force as an independent military branch.[82] In general, *The Times* covered the international ambitions of the Italian government without commentary. Truthfully, these installments seemingly filled the necessary space needed in the section. In fact, the paper remained fairly occupied covering the German presidential elections, Soviet anxieties, student riots in Paris and the political stability in India and South Africa.[83] In

[78] *The Times*, 5 March 1925.
[79] Ibid.
[80] *The Times*, 31 March 1925.
[81] *The Times*, 3 April 1925.
[82] *The Times*, 27 April 1925.
[83] *The Times*, 9 March 1925, 13 March 1925.

essence, the Italian military updates served as filler on quiet days and remained completely absent from the weeklies.

On the other hand, the British press did consider the passage of the Electoral Reform Bill in early 1925 worthy of regular coverage. Mussolini championed this bill which altered the Italian electoral system and, more importantly, extended his term in office. The press responded to his extended term as the dismantling of constitutionalism in Italy. Coupling the Reform Bill with the continued aggression of the Party, *The Economist* ran an editorial entitled "The New Crisis in Italy," noting that Mussolini was "a master of Italian political tactics."[84] *The New Statesman* also published a rather lengthy political notation explaining that Mussolini had "extend[ed] his dictatorship for a further spell."[85] Consequently, the weekly suggested, with a hint of sarcasm, that any attempt to transform the "regime of bludgeoning and suppression into constitutionalism" would be "difficult."[86] Therefore, *The New Statesman* alluded to the impossibility of a legitimate fascist government as "[s]ome of the wolves may refuse to become sheep."[87] In a sense, *The New Statesman* continued to await the fall of Mussolini and his fascism. Three months later, the weekly again referred to the faltering fascist government in an editorial concerning "The Opposition Parties in Italy." In this editorial, *The New Statesman* chronicled the chaos riddling the political landscape of Italy. Explaining that "the key to Mussolini's latest triumph [was] confusion in the enemy camp," the writer detailed the immense disagreement within each opposition party as well as across the opposition as a whole.[88] Since chaotic squabbling consumed the opposition and fascism remained "morally discredited," *The New*

[84] *The Economist*, 10 January 1925.
[85] *The New Statesman*, 24 January 1925.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] *The New Statesman*, 14 March, 1925.

Statesman painted an extremely bleak future for Italian politics and thus furthered the theory of dangerous instability.[89] Similarly, *The Spectator* commented on the futility of "continually postponed" so –called legitimate elections if Mussolini's term went continually extended.[90] Therefore, in agreement with the other weeklies, *The Spectator* admitted "[t]he Savior of Italy has returned to his original method. . ."[91] Faced with continued aggression and the extended dictatorship, *The Spectator* surmised that "in a country which has once tasted constitutionalism," the current system "cannot last."[92] Evidently, the previous optimism aimed at Mussolini's success was eclipsed by a violent and unstable reality.

Finally, in addition to condemning Mussolini's continued aggression and rejection of constitutionalism, the British press denounced Mussolini and his party for the suppression of the press. This suppression, integral to fascism's political dominance, had remained a point of discussion since the March on Rome. Additionally, the press detailed the violent invasions and burnings of anti-fascist newspapers in cities throughout Italy. As late as December 1924, *Il Mardo* printed an article simply detailing the members of the Fascist Party involved in the Matteotti Affair.[93] Immediately, the Party closed the paper by force.[94] As with the thuggish brutality that sustained fascist supremacy, the British press bizarrely predicted the end of censorship as fascism stabilized. Disregarding the suppression as a political tool in the maintenance of power, the press remained optimistic for almost three years. However, by 1925, *The Spectator* and *The Economist* recognized that the censorship of the opposition press thwarted

[89] Ibid.
[90] *The Spectator*, 17 January 1925.
[91] *The Spectator*, 10 January 1925.
[92] *The Spectator*, 10 January 1925.
[93] *The Economist*, 10 January 1925.
[94] Ibid.

any possibility of the opposition's proper organization.[95] As the Fascist Party intended, the "intensity of the opposition's campaign" diminished as the "suppression of the press" increased.[96] As explained by *The Spectator*, "[e]very newspaper that dare[d] to appear with candid criticism of the Government [was] seized." Consequently, the Fascist Party faced minimal challenges to the established power structure, and the election process seemed a fascist fraud. With this unassailable system, *The New Statesman* conceded that the weekly would "not be surprised if Mussolini decide[d] to go on being Mussolini."[97]

Though the fascist institution seemed impregnable, the continual violence and suppression of the press also evidenced instability to the British press. Inconceivably, fascism was at once monolithic and rickety. Armed with this contradiction, *The New Statesman*, after concluding that fascism faced failure, concurred with an Italian deputy who suggested that Italians feel "[f]ascism represents, or can be made to represent, something native to Italy."[98] Therefore, the weekly surmised that the Italian people would continue to support fascism.[99] As riddled by confusion as the Italian opposition, the British press struggled to understand Mussolini and his improvisation: fascism. And though the press approached fascism in 1925 with the same obvious confusion as in 1922, criticism emerged as optimism faded. As violence and censorship became institutions of fascism rather than preliminary devices, the British press uniformly criticized fascism. *The Economist*, in a subtle and rare attempt to explain the radical transformation of opinion, compared the rise of fascism in Italy after World War I to the rise of

[95] *The Economist*, 10 January 1925. *The Spectator*, 17 January 1925.
[96] *The Spectator*, 17 January 1925.
[97] *The New Statesman*, 24 January 1925.
[98] *The New Statesman*, 14 March 1925.
[99] Ibid.

the Ku Klux Klan in the American South during Reconstruction.[100] Explaining the relationship between fear, violence, and the current government, the writer suggested, "In such emergencies, the wielding of bayonets – even by a self commissioned minority – is tolerated by public opinion, because a danger is felt to exist which bayonets can effectively drive away."[101] However, the "reversion to violence has made it impossible for the Fascist movement to effect a euthanasia, and has doomed it to eventual destruction by those methods on which it has itself relied."[102] Therefore, in the opinion of the British papers, Mussolini, the savior who bayoneted the chaos of post-World War I Italy, reverted to violence under fascism by bayoneting legitimate and constitutional government. Armed with this understanding, Low's crazed Mussolooney, threatening to "stick" his valentine, must have carried a more pregnant meaning to British readers than the other Mussolini simply wielding castor oil.

Between 1925 and early 1927, Italian fascism again dissolved from the average British newspaper readers' awareness except for mentions of dealings between Italy and Albania and relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. Though Italy was mentioned frequently, *The Times* touched on basic facts of foreign policy with little additional commentary or analysis. In general, the British press seemed mildly disappointed in Italy's refusal to negotiate with Yugoslavia, but the papers remained more occupied by communist activity in China.[103] However, in April 1927, Mussolini's Italy regained British journalists' attention. Published on the 23rd of April, Mussolini's Labor Charter was "a declaration of general principles on which whole Fascist labour and social legislation [was] based, and likewise serve[d] as a guide for future legislation

[100] *The Economist*, 10 January, 1925.
[101] Ibid.
[102] *The Economist*, 10 January 1925.
[103] *The Spectator*, 23 April 1927.

in the matter," as described by *The Times*.[104] In fact, *The Times* printed the entire charter as the leading story in the foreign news section.[105] As Britain struggled with the legislative implications of its own Trade Union Movement in the aftermath of the General Strike, the press carefully eyed the Italian model and found great error. In fact, while Britain grappled with the Italian solution, David Low sketched a cartoon of John Bull "trying on a Fascist cap" sent "From Mussolini to Stanley."[106] John Bull stands in front of a mirror – surrounded by castor oil, a dagger, and pistols – gaping at his own reflection. Evidently, the fascist cap was the wrong look for the average Englishman.

Within a matter of weeks, most of the mainstream press agreed with John Bull; the look was all wrong for Britain. Primarily, the press found the Charter disturbingly totalitarian. The actual diction and the implied consequences nestled too closely to Hegelianism and generated a negative and/or alarmed evaluation.[107] Even though the Charter designated "private enterprise as the most efficacious and most useful method of production," the state could intervene in any business it deemed "lacking" or "inefficient."[108] Additionally, the Charter required that "all professional or syndical organizations must be approved by the state" or else they could not "represent" a "category of workers." Though the press all described the Charter as unoriginal, they uniformly cited these two articles as evidence of the totalitarian implications of the fascist plan. *The New Statesman* resolved that the Charter would "establish a Hegelian state, in which the State is everything and the individual or the group next to nothing."[109] Taking almost two months to respond, *The Economist* noted that the Charter "mark[ed] the peak of Signor

[104] *The Times*, 23 April 1927.
[105] Ibid.
[106] *The Star*, 21 April 1927.
[107] *The New Statesman*, 30 April 1927. *The Spectator*, 30 April 1927.
[108] *The Times*, 23 April 1927.
[109] *The New Statesman*, 30 April 1927

Mussolini's effort to subjugate the entire life of the nation and of the individual to the control of the Fascist Party."[110] *The Spectator* submitted the "audacious and unparalleled scheme" as "idealistic and philosophic, sometimes touching the note of a metaphysician.[111] Regardless of politics, the British papers found Mussolini's Charter dangerously powerful, if not impossibly so. Additionally, the press gawked at the article requiring employment preference to "members of the Fascist Party or Fascist syndicates."[112] Because these syndicates also required governmental approval, the press criticized the potential effects during periods of high unemployment on "Socialist, Catholic, or Liberal" workers, siding with the voice of the opposition.[113] The Charter's goal of consolidating "capital and labour under the supreme authority of the state" surely reminded the press of their anti-Soviet anxieties and ultimately generated "much speculation…around the philosophy of Fascism."[114] For many British citizens, the Corporative State lost its appeal when "at every turn the hand of the state [was] firmly imposed."[115] However, even though the British press inundated its public with disapproval, some citizens found the Corporative model attractive. Responding to *The Times*' coverage of the Charter, the economist W.A.S. Hewins wrote to the editor that "Mussolini deserves our admiration as a statesman, if for no other reason, for the fact that he sees a solution of the Labour question which is neither socialism nor reaction, but national."[116] As a lonely voice of praise in Britain, Hewins, a Member of Parliament before the First World War, advocated a "neo-mercantilist approach to the state

[110] *The Economist*, 14 May 1927.
[111] *The Spectator*, 30 April 1927.
[112] *The Times*, 23 April 1927.
[113] *The Economist*, 14 May 1927.
[114] Ibid.
[115] *The Times*, 25 April 1927.
[116] *The Times*, 26 April 1927.

and economy" and therefore sympathized with Mussolini's Corporative aims for Italy.[117] Throughout his career, he encouraged Britain to discard Gladstone's Liberalism and to abandon consumer-focused economics.[118] Instead, Hewins campaigned for a nationalistic devotion to "the needs of the new imperial community."[119] In other words, he applauded the totalitarian and nationalistic goals of the Charter that the British press so condemned. However, his weighty record of public service prompted *The Times* to publish his atypical response.

Though the press squabbled over the articles of Mussolini's Labor Charter for several weeks during the spring of 1927, the papers concurred that the Charter was not "much to write home about…"[120] Rather, the Charter compiled the Corporative aims of Italian fascism without launching any concrete legislation. However, the Italian solution to the labor question resounded in Britain as the British struggled to answer similar questions. Therefore, the peaked interest surrounding the Charter is perhaps evidence of British anxieties about the Trade Union movement more than a fascination with the objectives of fascism. Nonetheless, the British, like Low, quickly resolved that the Italian model was an ill fit for their island. Within a few weeks, the noise about Italy again dissipated into smaller mentions of Italian relations with Yugoslavia. For the next two years, the press tended to highlight pieces of Italian foreign policy rather than to offer any in depth analysis of the institution of fascism. However, in February 1929, Italian news erupted back into British consciousness with the passage of the Concordat and the Lateran Pacts. This formal agreement, comprised of three parts, compensated Vatican City for the acquisition of

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[117] A. C. Howe, 'Hewins, William Albert Samuel (1865–1931)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/view/article/33848 (accessed March 31 2009)

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] *The New Statesman*, 30 April 1927.

the Papal States while acknowledging its independent status. Overall, the Pacts renegotiated the relationship between Italy and Vatican City, ending the thorny predicament known as the Roman Question since the unification.

In the midst of this media flurry, David Low published a cartoon in the *Evening Standard* depicting Mussolini outside St. Peter's flocked by a group of doves.[121] Nearby, Churchill, Briand, and Chamberlain stand huddled in bewilderment flocked by a group of question marks.[122] In truth, the British press seemed rather perplexed by the new relationship, applauding the peace yet questioning the implications of it. *The Times* declared the Pacts "a happy ending" and devoted several columns to the coverage of Mussolini's "personal triumph."[123] In fact, on the third day of coverage, the paper asserted that if Mussolini and Pius XI brought "their common work to a satisfactory consummation their names w[ould] go down among the great makers of history…"[124] Similarly, *The Spectator* suggested that "the Monarchy and the Government w[ould] gain immensely by Papal recognition," so "Catholics and Protestants alike may hope that it will bring blessings to the Christian world."[125]

Not all publications found fuzzy Christian comfort in the Concordat and Lateran Pacts, however. *The New Statesman* and *The Economist* feared that the agreement inflated the power of the fascist state on the international stage. *The Economist* noted that this announcement was "the most searching test of its power to which the Fascist regime has yet submitted itself."[126] The weekly also stressed that the "re-established compulsory religious instruction and the regulation

[121] The Evening Standard, 12 February 1929 in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=1&search=1929%20Mussolini; accessed March 31, 2009.
[122] Ibid.
[123] *The Times*, February 11 1929 & *The Times*, February 12 1929.
[124] *The Times*, February 13 1929.
[125] *The Spectator*, February 16 1929.
[126] *The Economist*, February 16 1929.

of marriage by Canon Law" seemed to be a dangerous and somewhat retrograde step for Italy. [127] The writers also questioned the future legality of divorce and remarriage if these entities fell under the Church's power.[128] Similarly, *The New Statesman*, in an article by Sisley Huddleston, suggested that the Vatican would become dependent on Italy as Mussolini "derive[d] exorbitant benefits from this arrangement."[129] Amidst widespread acclaim, *The Economist* and *The New Statesman* doubted the agreement was a perfect peace. Therefore, as Huddleston resolved that "the Catholic forces are reconciled with the forces of fascism,"[130] *The Spectator* affirmed that the Roman Catholic Church had not "swallowed Fascism."[131] In 1929, as in 1922, the British press approached fascism with confusion, often forming contradictory assessments.

[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] *The New Statesman*, 16 February 1929.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *The New Statesman*, 16 February 1929. & *The Spectator*, 16 February 1929.

PART III: JANUARY 1935 TO MAY 1936

On the 4th of October 1935, the British press announced that Italy had officially invaded Abyssinia, breaching decades of peace negotiations and formal treaties. As Abyssinia and Italy both retained membership in the League of Nations, this assault on a sovereign nation afforded the League an opportunity to demonstrate muscle or impotence. As League members bickered over appropriate responses, the future of collective security, which served as the focus of Europe's anxieties about militant conflict, became hazy. On this same day, David Low, always apt to comment on the Duce, published a sketch of Mussolini in *The Evening Standard* unplugging the Earth's cap.[132] From the remaining hole, out crawled the devil.[133] Low's description read, "The Man Who Took the Lid Off."[134] Low's cartoon precisely illustrates the media response to the Abyssinian Crisis in October. However, these anxieties had bubbled under the surface since January of that year, as Mussolini hoarded men and munitions along Abyssinia's borders. In fact, the two nations had convened in several skirmishes resulting in Abyssinia's appeal for action to the League. Therefore, before Mussolini brought British anxieties to a boil in October, Britain had ten months to thrash over the international implications of Italian fascism.

Recognizing the thorny political landscape of 1935, the British government "faced two equally unpleasant alternatives."[135] By advocating League action and support for Abyssinia, the

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[132] *The Evening Standard*, 4 October 1935 in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=7&search=David%20Low%20October%201935
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 181.

British risked pushing Mussolini "into the arms of Germany."[136] By quietly complying with Italy's aggressive conquest in Abyssinia, the British risked eliminating the future political influence of the League.[137] Searching for middle ground, the Government participated in a regular exchange of ambassadors, letters, and negotiations in Rome and Geneva. The press traced the diplomatic maneuvers of the British government across the European continent as the Government attempted to define Italian motives and the nature of the fascist regime. Before the invasion in early October, the British participated in a series of compromises, using that term loosely, offering Italy a "privileged economic position in Ethiopia, with the right to appoint Italian advisors to the police and install an Italian-dominated military and bureaucracy."[138] Mussolini repeatedly rejected these compromises, though the terms heavily favored Italy, "reinforcing his image of international thug."[139] After the invasion, the British government continued to contribute to the fruitless international squabbling as a member of the League and as a behind-the-scenes negotiator. Though Britain backed the League's sanctions against Italy in the fall of 1935, the Government carefully wobbled between a staunch pro-League and a frail anti-Italian foreign policy line throughout the Abyssinian conquest.[140]

The British government's response to Italian aggression in Abyssinia appears rather feeble in retrospect. Considering the dangerous implications, the British government's puny sanctions seem inadequate when "public opinion was overwhelmingly sympathetic to Ethiopia."[141] In fact, the British press, particularly *The New Statesman*, increasingly vocalized their distress over the Government's scrawny reaction to the international consequences of

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid. , 183.
[141] Ibid.

Italian fascism. However, aside from enhancing the sanctions and enforcing an oil embargo with all of Europe and the United States, the Government had few realistic options in terms of punishment. Britain was ill equipped, militarily and mentally, to go to war with Italy. And though the desire to maintain peace spawned the concoction that was the League and collective security, Britain and its fellow members had no experience sustaining collective diplomacy. In a sense, the League and Britain blindly scrambled to punish Mussolini with few reasonable alternatives to puny sanctions. Additionally, the Abyssinian invasion marked a true change in British attitudes towards Mussolini. The international implications of Italian fascism finally became concrete and perilous. Furthermore, to respond appropriately to the newly "international thug" that was Mussolini, knowledge of his motives and intentions needed to accumulate. Though Britain called for League action, the Government remained unable to intervene militarily and to devise a uniform plan of response. Instead, the British government found themselves drifting into isolationism until Mussolini became part of a much bigger story.[142]

Like the Government, the pre-invasion attitude of the mainstream British press remained very pro-League. *The New Statesman*, *The Times*, and *The Spectator* agreed that *if* Italy invaded Abyssinia, Britain and the other members were "bound to apply certain specified sanction against the aggressor."[143] Each publication urged both nations to comply with the procedural processes of conflict resolution administered by the League. Additionally, each recognized, and repeatedly reaffirmed, that the potency of the League relied upon the resolution of the crisis. Consequently, as the tension and ammunition amassed along the Abyssinian border, the coverage of the crisis became frequent and worthy of the front page in *The Times*, *The New Statesman*, and

[142] Ibid. , 187.
[143] William A. Robson, *The Political Quarterly in the 1930s*, (Plymouth: Penguin, 1971), 165.

The Spectator. From January to October, Italy, Mussolini, and his activity in Africa remained unavoidable for any British citizen with a subscription. As the papers inundated citizens with the urgency of the situation, Mussolini captivated Britain with the dangerous implications of his potential war.

Focusing on the pre-invasion reaction of *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator*, the responses of these two weeklies aligned in two ways. First, both publications editorialized amidst a cloud of confusion and were unable to receive accurate reports on fascist activity and ambitions in Africa. Second, both weeklies developed budding anti-fascist stances in that they remained first and foremost advocates of collective security and the League. Therefore, these two weeklies, which represent the mainstream British response, enhanced their hostility towards Italian fascism as it increasingly imperiled the League's future. For example, *The New Statesman* asserted that "everything depend[ed] on intervention."[144] Therefore, these writers resolved that Britain and the League had to decide "between offending Italy and throwing the corpse of collective security to the dogs."[145] *The Spectator* similarly confirmed that the League could obtain more "power and influence" by maintaining its "principles."[146] However, if "it abandons them it is ignored and condemned."[147] By the summer, both weeklies acknowledged that Britain could not "go back on allegiance to the League" and, therefore, must support Abyssinia if it were unlawfully attacked.[148]

Though the pre-invasion responses recognized the authority of the League, Britain's obligation as a member, and the dangerous consequences of war, the weeklies differed

[144] *The New Statesman*, 18 May 1935.
[145] Ibid.
[146] *The Spectator*, 5 July 1935.
[147] Ibid.
[148] *The Spectator*, 28 June 1935.

in their journalistic approach. In other words, the publications initially interpreted the crisis through very different lenses while still advocating League intervention. *The New Statesman*, as early as February, suggested that Mussolini was "staging a diversion of no permanent importance" to indulge the "high spirits" of his fascist disciples with "the excitement of the circus."[149] Condemning these militant treats as ludicrous propaganda, the weekly declared that if this be the case, he "offend[ed] against the good manners and the humanity without which there is no civilisation."[150] Furthermore, *The New Statesman* argued that if the crisis was more than a propaganda stunt, then Mussolini was satisfying his "Roman and Imperial ambitions."[151] They supposed that Mussolini was "placating hostile neighbors in Europe in order to free his hands in Africa."[152] Whether engaging in imperialism or propaganda, the weekly noted, "The Duce [was] magnifying a minor and doubtful dispute with his customary theatrical brutality…"[153] Therefore, the publication approached the crisis from a critical perspective not even entertaining the notion that Mussolini's claims were valid. Of course, this perspective is consistent with *The New Statesman*'s increasingly anti-fascist approach to the coverage of Italy since the March on Rome. Vocalizing these reoccurring sentiments, *The New Statesman* printed a poem detailing the crisis called "The Ethiopian Says 'Bo' To The Eagle."[154] The writers composed: "Straight sounds Il Duce the advance/(Forethought providing for this chance)/And war-dogs are unleashed from Rome,/Rehearsed on Liberals at home." Therefore, noting fascism's militant domestic record, the writers encouraged Abyssinia to "press upon the Council of the League her demand for the dispute to be referred to arbitration" because the League needed "to prevent the trouble in Africa

[149] *The New Statesman*, 16 February 1935.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] *The New Statesman*, 33 March 1935.
[153] Ibid.
[154] *The New Statesman*, 23 February 1935.

from developing further."[155] *The New Statesman* resolved, even nine months before the official invasion, that the crisis necessitated immediate attention from the council as Italy's intentions sullied the League's reputation. Based on Mussolini's militant record, they should refuse to allow Mussolini to "gamble not merely with the fortunes of his own country but with everyone else's."[156]

Though in agreement that "the supreme British interest [was] the maintenance of peace," *The Spectator* drudged its way into the anti-fascist camp.[157] As *The New Statesman* released its critical analysis of fascist involvement in the crisis, *The Spectator* deemed the coverage of "Italian mobilization and an ultimatum to Abyssinia" as "alarmist rumours."[158] The publication notified its readers that they were mistaken to believe "that because Abyssinia is a small, and Italy a Great Power, the balance of right must necessarily be on Abyssinia's side."[159] Throughout the spring of 1935, its writers admitted that Italy's displays of "her expeditionary forces and its warlike preparations with such flamboyancy" were "regrettable."[160] However, this flamboyancy was merely "in the Italian manner and exaggerated importance should not be attached to it."[161] As *The New Statesman* heightened its criticism and covered the increasing tension between Italy and Abyssinia, *The Spectator* encouraged Italy and Abyssinia to "refer" their complaints to the League, but noted "Italy, is of course, entitled to take what precautions she thinks necessary."[162] Therefore, this commentary evidences that *The Spectator* initially approached the crisis as a

[155] *The New Statesman*, 2 March 1935.
[156] *The New Statesman*, 27 July 1935.
[157] *The New Statesman*, 10 August 1935.
[158] *The Spectator*, 15 February 1935.
[159] Ibid.
[160] *The Spectator*, 1 March 1935.
[161] Ibid.
[162] *The Spectator*, 5 April 1935 & *The Spectator*, 17 May 1935.

legitimate dispute between two members of the League, instead of presuming the Duce's tomfoolery.

In addition to varying interpretations of the origins of the crisis, *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator* maintained dissimilar evaluations of the European reaction. *The New Statesman*, regarding Mussolini's actions as unlawful, criticized the British government and the League for its slow response. The weekly suggested that the Government displayed "an attitude of very benevolent neutrality towards Italian designs."[163] The writers criticized Foreign Minister Anthony Eden's recent trip to Rome as unnecessarily "cordial" while blaming his "well meant, if clumsy, attempt" to negotiate with Mussolini as making "matters worse."[164] On the other hand, *The Spectator* applauded the reactions of both the League and the Government. As *The New Statesman* bemoaned the League's decision to push Abyssinia's complaint off the agenda until May, *The Spectator* glowed with approval when the League convened in Geneva, asserting that the handling of the dispute "relect[ed] credit on everyone concerned."[165] Additionally, *The Spectator* praised Mussolini for "the strength of mind" he exhibited when "retiring after long negotiation from a position which he could not retain."[166] However, *The New Statesman*, while detailing the stockpiling of arms on the borders of Abyssinia, noted that Mussolini's attempts to negotiate appeared rather flimsy.[167] Furthermore, by summer, *The New Statesman* already promoted the League's closing of the Suez Canal to Italian ships.[168] However, *The Spectator* argued that "any public talk of possible sanctions would be both premature and provocative."[169]

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[163] *The New Statesman*, 23 February 1935.
[164] *The New Statesman*, 29 June 1935 & *The New Statesman*, 13 July 1935.
[165] *The Spectator*, 31 May 1935.
[166] Ibid.
[167] *The New Statesman*, 15 June 1935.
[168] *The New Statesman*, 29 June 1935.
[169] *The Spectator*, 9 August 1935.

Importantly, *The Spectator* repeatedly confirmed to its readers that Italy had not yet broken the terms of the League Covenant.[170] These constant reminders seem to bolster *The Spectator*'s endorsement of British leadership in the League while undermining the urgency demanded by *The New Statesman*. Therefore, *The Spectator* seemingly comforted its readers that the League and Britain's management of Italy remained "all it should be."[171]

These alternate evaluations of the League and the Government reflect alternate responses to the first glimpses of valid fascist international aims. *The New Statesman* regarded Italy's actions as an immediate threat to collective security six months before *The Spectator* even acknowledged that Mussolini's maneuvers in Africa were utterly illegitimate.[172] By August, *The Spectator* admitted that Mussolini "ha[d] no aim but aggression and annexation" and how this aim threatened the "whole precarious structure of the post-War world."[173] Though maintaining its faith in the League and British leadership, *The Spectator* acknowledged Mussolini's increasingly "wild and inflammatory words" and his determination "on war at any cost."[174] As Mussolini continued to "pour contempt on the perfectly just claims of Abyssinia," *The Spectator* made its first moves into the anti-fascist camp.

After the invasion on October 3, 1935, the mainstream British press transformed its coverage of Italian fascism. As Mussolini's belligerent rhetoric solidified into planes, bombs, and mustard gas, the British press united to condemn the tenets and consequences of Italian fascism, not only in Africa but in Europe. Crucial to the Abyssinian discussion was a desperate attempt to understand the nature of Mussolini's regime. Therefore, again focusing on *The New*

[170] *The Spectator*, 2 August 1935.
[171] *The Spectator*, 23 August 1935.
[172] *The Spectator*, 2 August 1935.
[173] *The Spectator*, 23 August 1935.
[174] *The Spectator*, 2 August 1935.

Statesman and *The Spectator* as two politically diverse examples from the mainstream press, these publications approached fascism from a newly analytical perspective. Consequently, the press, in addition to its normal war coverage of troop movements and casualty rates, studied fascism from two platforms: fascism as a political machine and fascism as a future institution. As Mussolini's tanks rolled in Abyssinia the patriotic fervor in Italy escalated in his favor demonstrating to the British media that fascism was no longer merely a political experiment but a multi-state movement with dire international consequences.

After the invasion, David Low sketched another cartoon for the *Evening Standard* featuring, on one side, an image of a village made up of huts.[175] Outside one of these huts, an Abyssinian mother sits with her arms outstretched to her baby crawling towards her.[176] On the other side of the cartoon, a plane, flying off into the horizon, has obliterated the village of huts with no remaining trace of the mother and baby.[177] The first image is entitled Barbarism while the second is entitled Civilization.[178] The default excuse for imperialism in Africa remained the civilizing of savages even in the British Empire. Seamlessly, Mussolini picked up the mantle of civilization and charged into Abyssinia. However, since Abyssinia held League membership and the fruits of conquest were Italian, the British public watched in horror as Mussolini paraded brutality as a civilizing force. In truth, Mussolini's militant methods in Abyssinia shocked the world as the fascists thoughtlessly bombed Red Cross stations and used poison gas against civilian villages.[179] The brutality practiced on dissidents at home was truly "unleashed" upon

[175] Evening Standard, 11 October 1935. in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=146&search=David%20Low%201935
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] *The New Statesman*, 4 April 1935.

Abyssinia as predicted by *The New Statesman*.[180] These first glimpses of the international consequences of fascism forced the British press to investigate the true political structure of Italy, specifically the increasing militancy and totalitarianism of the fascist political machine.

By winter of 1936, the mainstream press identified militancy as a permanent tenet of Italian fascism. In January, *The New Statesman* printed an editorial labeled "Why Mussolini Went to War."[181] The publication suggested that imperialist rhetoric in Italy, unlike other European nations, refrained from placing "much stock" in "the economic benefits of Italian imperial expansion."[182] Instead, fascism relied on a constant state of war, which existed for "moral and political reasons."[183] Fascist rhetoric involved whipping up the masses' sense of vitality through confidence and aggression.[184] The writers explained that "Italy ha[d] a mission…Italy is virile; she must find an outlet for her zeal and vigour."[185] To the Italian people, Abyssinia was that outlet, and as a result "the atmosphere [was] stiflingly patriotic."[186] In a sense, the Italian behavior "suggest[ed] a taste for butchery rather than civilizing zeal…"[187] *The Spectator* similarly explained the Abyssinian conflict to its readers in an editorial entitled "The Poison Gas Campaign."[188] No longer attributing fascist violence as a temporary political device in the maintenance of power, the weekly detailed the numerous Red Cross bombings and the debilitating effects of mustard gas on civilian populations.[189] Like those of *The New Statesman*, its writers resolved that this militancy seemingly had no ultimate mission aside from serving as

[180] *The New Statesman*, 23 February 1935.
[181] *The New Statesman*, 4 January 1936.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] *The New Statesman*, 23 May 1936.
[188] *The Spectator*, 10 April 1936.
[189] Ibid.

an aggressive outlet.[190] These early realizations about the inherent brutality in the fascist political structure mark an important development in the British understanding of fascism. The press began to appreciate that fascism perpetually relied on violence, and the implications of this political structure were potentially damning for European peace. This recognition fueled the beginnings of true British anti-fascism.

As Italian aggression moved abroad, the press began to cover the increasingly totalitarian political structure of fascism in Italy. The elimination of the parliamentary system and economic freedoms that alarmed the British so in the Soviet Union became increasingly the reality in Italy. *The New Statesman* suggested that the remnants of the Italian Senate were merely a political sham "to demonstrate that the totalitarian political dictatorship has not been so totalitarian in economics and social affairs."[191] Additionally, the publication often noted the Italian dependence on patriotic propaganda maintained the totalitarian state.[192] In particular, Sylvia Sanders mentioned that the fascists fueled public support for the war by printing anti-British propaganda in hopes of discrediting the British opposition.[193] Also emphasizing the totalitarian tendencies of fascism, *The Spectator* printed several editorials detailing the nationalization of important Italian industries. Bemoaning the nationalization of the banks, *The Spectator* described this event as "another step in Italy's advance to complete totalitarianism."[194] The weekly feared that the nationalization of other "key industries" signaled that the "wheels of Destiny mov[ed] fast towards total war."[195] The inherent brutality of fascism coupled with the increasingly totalitarian politics under Mussolini forced *The Spectator* to scrap its remaining optimism. In fact, after the

[190] Ibid.
[191] *The New Statesman*, 4 January 1936.
[192] *The New Statesman*, 21 December 1935.
[193] Ibid.
[194] *The Spectator*, 6 March 1936.
[195] *The Spectator*, 27 March 1936.

invasion, *The Spectator* printed an editorial called "From Machiavelli to Mussolini" written by J.L. Hammond.[196] Hammond explained that fascism in Europe meant "a series of national states, each pursuing its own selfish advantage as its one exclusive aim."[197] As each state retained "no higher duty than to maintain itself," the resulting political atmosphere would be consumed by "such a confusion and discord" that collective security would become a political impossibility.[198] According to Hammond and much of the British press, fascism was the enemy of collective security. No longer a European experiment, fascism as a militant and totalitarian political machine seemingly threatened the peace of post-war Europe.

Consequently, the British press, after appreciating the political structure of fascism, investigated fascism as a future institution in Europe or, in other words, its future implications for the continent. *The Spectator* printed an editorial by Francis Gower, who had recently visited Italy.[199] After consulting with Italians from all over Italy on trains and in cafes, he resolved that the Italian population generally supported the aims of fascism.[200] The Italian people, after thirteen years of fascism, believed "the only reality in world politics is interest and power."[201] They asked him "Why do people talk so endlessly in England?"[202] They, as a people, would "let Geneva chatter," but they only advocated "Italy's needs, will, and power."[203] They believed in a new Roman Empire based on "Mussolini's system of thought," even if that meant "blotting out the sun" with airplanes.[204] According to this reasoning, the subtext of his article read that the fascist political machine conditioned the Italian people to become warlike populace eyeing future

[196] *The Spectator*, 18 October 1935.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] *The Spectator*, 1 November 1935.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.

glory, no matter the costs. The British could no longer look at fascism as an Italian problem, especially with Hitler conditioning Germany.

Armed with this new perspective, the British press began to allude frequently to the implications of fascism as a future fixture in Europe. These allusions increasingly connected Mussolini's current behavior to Hitler's future actions in Europe. Immediately after the Abyssinian invasion, *The New Statesman* suggested Britain must make "a stand against aggressive Fascism which is using war as well as lies as its instrument first to pick up a colony in Africa, and then to impose its own brutal system in Europe."[205] Noting that Mussolini's repeated treaty violations set a dangerous "precedent" if left unpunished, the publication cautioned its readers that "a precedent is set by this toleration, which warns us all to fear the worst when the scene of the next explosion of Fascist militarism is transferred to Europe."[206] Finally, the weekly plainly stated Britain's ultimate fear: since "the way of the aggressor is not too hard" in Europe, Mussolini "had learned the lesson…and he has passed it on to Hitler."[207] *The Spectator* similarly voiced these apprehensions in the spring of 1936, suggesting that if Europe and the League continued to "condone" Italian violence then "Germany can well afford to ignore it altogether."[208] Italian fascism no longer just threatened the future of the League of Nations but threatened also to empower Germany, another fascist state. By the spring of 1936, with this new grip on fascism as a future institution in Europe, the weeklies began to hone in on the political situation in Germany. By late spring, these German accounts became the headlines as Italy's war in Abyssinia fell below them in the foreign news section.

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[205] *The New Statesman*, 12 October 1935.
[206] *The New Statesman*, 4 April 1936.
[207] *The New Statesman*, 18 April 1936.
[208] *The Spectator*, 10 April 1936.

The Abyssinian invasion by Italy transformed British opinion and understanding of fascism. No longer just a bizarre Italian innovation, fascism in 1936 became a militant European program threatening the continent's power structure. As Italy demonstrated the international aims of fascism, anti-fascism, though not integrated into the vernacular, became a new, multi-dimensional stance in British politics in recognition of the fascist threat. *The Spectator* labeled Mussolini "The Destroyer," asserting his actions had engendered "humiliation for the world."[209] The weekly declared that Mussolini had single handedly "destroyed an ancient empire," modernization in Africa, "faith in an Italian signature," "Anglo-Italian relations for a generation," and perhaps the League.[210] Considering this mound of evidence called the Abyssinian War, David Low was quite right about Mussolini or Mussolooney or The Destroyer. He most definitely ripped the lid off European security and let the devil run free.

[209] *The Spectator*, 8 May 1936.
[210] Ibid.

PART IV: JULY 1936 TO APRIL 1939

In the spring of 1936, a war of words crisscrossed the European continent as the international press cultivated the tension between democracy and fascism. In July, Spain provided the venue for an actual war with all the deadly trappings. Rather than in Addis Ababa, Adigrat, or Assab, the war of words raged on from Madrid, Barcelona, and Guernica. As the British press tussled with Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, the Spanish right, lead by General Francisco Franco, challenged the authority of the newly-elected Popular Front government in a summer coup d'etat.[211] Though the Spanish government, the Loyalists, managed to retain control in Madrid and Barcelona, much of the north and west of Spain fell to General Franco and the Nationalists.[212] Within weeks, Germany and Italy sent reinforcements to their ally, Franco. Italian forces in Spain, at the height of the conflict, reached 40,000 to 50,000 troops, armed with 660 aircraft and 150 tanks.[213] As tensions escalated between Italy and Britain, Franco's Spain promised Mussolini not only another friend in Europe, but a threatened British base at Gibraltar and potential control of the Mediterranean.[214] Armed with Blackshirts, Franco would owe victory to his "fascist mentors" in Italy and Germany.[215] The British political press recognized Franco's movement in Spain as another fascist grab for power in Europe, though current historians dispute this assessment.

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[211] Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 195.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid. , 196.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.

The Spanish Civil War captivated the British people because, in the words of Tom Buchanan, it "appeared to embody the great ideological conflicts of the day."[216] The Labour Party sympathized with the Loyalists of the Republic, and the British left, as a whole, romanticized the struggle in Spain as a chance to crush fascism.[217] On the other hand, the British right more quietly backed Franco, fearing the Popular Front government to be Bolshevik and therefore more hazardous than fascism.[218] Trying to avoid any possibility of armed conflict, the British Government, led by Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, followed the French example and adopted a policy of non-intervention in Spain.[219] Baldwin wanted to ensure healthy "relations with any Spanish government" that surfaced from the conflict.[220] Additionally, the Government hoped that non-intervention would uproot the flowering fascist friendship between Italy and Germany and reduce tension with Italy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.[221] (In fact, in 1938 the Government welcomed a Gentlemen's Agreement with Italy hoping to ease these very tensions. Amongst the terms, Britain would recognize Italian Abyssinia if Italy promised to remove its troops from Spain at the conclusion of the war.)[222] Unfortunately, non-intervention was not the fashion in Europe. Italy and Germany agreed to a policy of non-intervention as did twenty-six other countries, but both nations supplied Franco with men and munitions throughout the war.[223] In fact, the Non-intervention Committee, headed in London, became the "symbol of hypocrisy" since the members paraded a puny policy with no

[216] Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.
[217] Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 200.
[218] Buchanan, *Britain and The Spanish Civil War*, 38.
[219] Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 196.
[220] Ibid. , 198.
[221] Buchanan, *Britain and The Spanish Civil War*, 43.
[222] *The New Statesman*, 23 April 1938.
[223] Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 197.

punishments.[224] As Britain desperately fondled Italy in hopes of building healthy relations, Italy flagrantly poured arms into Spain.[225] These bizarre circumstances "ensured that…the Spanish Civil War would be inextricably bound up with appeasement."[226]

The Spanish Civil War incited heavy controversy in Great Britain. The public and the press usually fell into one of two camps: pro-Franco or pro-Republican. However, efforts to determine the appropriate method of response to the growing fascist threat scattered British opinion into an infinite number of camps. Even within Baldwin's government (and later Neville Chamberlain's) there was profound disagreement concerning foreign relations with the fascist bloc. Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary during the period, resigned in 1938 because he disagreed with Chamberlain's appeasement of the fascist dictators, primarily Mussolini. Since Eden's appointment in 1935, Eden and Mussolini seemed to maintain an almost visceral aversion to one another. They despised one another's egotistical mannerisms and publicly vocalized this personal antagonism. For example, *The Times* explained to its readers that the Italian press, mouth fed information by Mussolini, considered Eden the "inveterate enemy of Italy."[227] By winter 1938, Eden simply had had enough of Italy's insincerity and Mussolini's mulish behavior.[228] When Rome invited British diplomats to Rome for negotiations, Eden insisted that Britain refuse the offer until Mussolini recalled all Italian troops fighting in Spain.[229] He asserted that this was a "moment for Britain to stand firm and not plunge into negotiations unprepared."[230] On the other hand, Chamberlain and the Cabinet maintained that to refuse Rome

[224] Ibid.
[225] Buchanan, *Britain and The Spanish Civil War*, 43.
[226] Ibid.
[227] The Times, 22 February 1928.
[228] Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators* (Cambridge: The Times Publishing, 1962), 666.
[229] Ibid.
[230] *The Times*, February 22 1938.

would only heighten tensions between the two nations.[231] In response, Eden explained to Chamberlain's cabinet "that to open conversations in Rome now, when the diplomatic floor was littered with Mussolini's earlier broken promises, was too humiliating."[232] Then, this rising star in the Conservative party "resolved to resign if the Cabinet disagreed" with him, which it did.[233] Refusing to go before Parliament in support of Chamberlain's policy, he resigned his post as Foreign Secretary, to the surprise of Britain, in February of 1938. In his autobiography, Eden affirms the soundness his resignation and maintains that Chamberlain was foolish to consult with the Italians. He explains, "The unreliability of the Italians is historical and is increased in the present day by their being in the grip of a man responsible only to himself and subject to rushes of blood to the head."[234] Eden foresaw the hazards of appeasing Mussolini and rested his career on that claim.

In contrast, the Conservatives supporting Franco's cause did so more out of an aversion to communism than an affinity to fascism. Additionally, as German influence expanded, an alliance with the Soviets seemed forthcoming. Armed with this almost paranoid aversion, Conservatives perhaps considered that stable relations with the Italians would fashion a necessary ideological balance that in no way appeared to condone communism. Therefore, Conservatives generally backed non-intervention, while sustaining quiet pro-Franco leanings. Throughout the war, the British left bemoaned the non-interventionist policy of the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments, fearing the result of a fascist bloc in Europe bolstered by Spain. The British press on the left followed suit, and publications such as *The New Statesman* pleaded with the Government to intervene on behalf of the Loyalists. Defying British policy, 2,500 British

[231] Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 666.
[232] Ibid. , 667
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid. , 685.

citizens out of 18,000 non-Spaniards volunteered to fight on behalf of the Republican side in the International Brigade.[235] 500 of these Britons died in Spain attempting to halt the spread of fascism in Europe.[236] Therefore, even though public opinion in Britain generally sympathized with the Republicans over the fascists in Spain, the Government refused to budge on the issue. Baldwin and his followers remembered well the lesson of 1914.[237] They refused to allow another "obscure struggle" in Southern Europe to yank Britain into "the horrors" of a Second World War.[238]

David Low, going on fifteen years of lambasting Mussolini, sketched a cartoon for the *Evening Standard* that sums up British foreign policy during the Spanish Civil War. Mussolini and Hitler flank a child-like Franco dressed in Spanish regalia accessorized with a guitar and flamenco shells.[239] Neville Chamberlain, clutching his faithful umbrella, stands befuddled at the sight as Franco pleads, "Honest, Mister, there's nobody here but us Spaniards."[240] Clearly, fascist assistance in the war was an undeniable yet controversial fact. Across the board, the British press condemned the involvement of the Italians and the Germans. However, the publications differed as to whether Britain should also jump into the conflict or whether this should remain a Spanish problem fixed only by Spaniards. Needless to say, Chamberlain was not the only British citizen wearing a befuddled expression in the last years of the decade. *The New Statesman*, staunchly anti-fascist, advocated British intervention on behalf of the Republicans in order to halt the spread of fascism. *The Times* remained relatively neutral throughout the war and generally

[235] Ibid. , 9.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Doerr, *British Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1939*, 198.
[238] Ibid.
[239] *Evening Standard*, 22 February 1939 in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=summary&search=LSE2629
[240] Ibid.

supportive of non-intervention. *The Spectator*, though very critical of European fascism, believed the war to be purely a Spanish predicament and promoted conversations with Italy. Amidst perpetual confusion, the press, based upon political affiliation, bickered over methods of response to the growing fascist bloc, and this issue remained the largest point of contention until the beginning of the Second World War in Britain. Nevertheless, the press, regardless of politics, interpreted Italian fascism in the early years of the Spanish Civil War in three similar ways. Amidst the squabbling over Spain, the British press, as a group, resolved that Italian fascism was antagonistic to Britain, ailing at home, yet advantageous at the negotiating table.

Undeniably, Mussolini was a "prickly pear."[241] He blatantly poured Blackshirts into Spain while officially parading Italy as non-interventionist. He initiated an anti-British propaganda campaign in Italy, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East while proposing friendly negotiations with the British foreign ministers. He even offered an olive branch to Europe but added that this particular branch was "sprouting from a forest of eight million bayonets."[242] Mussolini was prickly indeed. *The New Statesman*, in particular, derived Italy's antagonism from its cozying up with Nazi Germany. This publication identified this relationship, though not wholly trusting, as a coalition intending to threaten the future of democratic Europe. The weekly resolved that Rome and Berlin "now united, prepared to march over [Britain] in step."[243] Consequently, the alliance of these "aggressively minded men" meant that Britain faced "a new Europe, full of incalculable perils."[244] Because "Fascism and dictatorship [were] exalted and invigorated," democracy had been "humbled and discouraged."[245] To this Labour mouth-piece,

[241] *The Times*, 3 November 1936.
[242] *The Times*, 26 October 1936.
[243] *The New Statesman*, 1 August 1936.
[244] *The New Statesman*, 3 September 1938 & *The New Statesman*, 8 October 1938.
[245] *The New Statesman*, 8 October 1938.

the alliance of Germany and Italy could never bring peace to Europe. *The Spectator* sincerely doubted the efficacy of any pact between Germany and Italy, deeming the Axis "a superficial alliance of expediency."[246] Rather, this weekly sensed Italy's antagonism from the sudden explosion of Anglophobia in Italy.[247] The publication noted that the Italian Press, run by the government, "poured a steady stream of invective against Great Britain."[248] Though the tension was "dangerous and groundless," *The Spectator* repeatedly suggested that Italy professed "a false and distorted representation of British policy laid daily before the people of Italy."[249] In addition, the weekly printed several editorials denouncing the Italian propaganda campaigns against Britain in the Middle East.[250] The writers warned readers that these campaigns threatened the stability of the British Empire, as Italy wished to discredit the authority of the British government. [251] Strangely, *The Spectator* refused to speculate why the Italians suddenly seemed so Anglophobic and repeatedly referred to the campaigns as "groundless." *The Times* extensively covered these propaganda campaigns. Additionally, the paper regularly printed Mussolini's speeches while commenting on their antagonistic tone. For example, *The Times* printed Mussolini's warning to a Nazi paper that "the democracies are done for." [252] A few months later, the paper published another speech aimed at the foreign press and lamented "the inundation of muddy ink, to which is logically linked hysterical and hypocritical oratory from certain Anglican pulpits…"[253] In addition to publishing these hostile pieces, *The Times* never failed to read the subtext of Mussolini's less direct orations, wondering, sometimes unjustifiably, if the Duce was

[246] *The Spectator*, 26 March 1937.
[247] *The Spectator*, 21 May 1937.
[248] *The Spectator*, 6 August 1937.
[249] Ibid.
[250] *The Spectator*, 31 December 1937.
[251] Ibid.
[252] *The Times*, 18 January 1937.
[253] *The Times*, 24 March 1937.

threatening Great Britain.[254] Therefore, with this avalanche of antagonism directed specifically at Britain, the press uniformly agreed, even when promoting peaceful relations, that Italian fascism was far from friendly during the Spanish Civil War. Much of the press would have agreed with Eden that "Mussolini ha[d] the mentality of a gangster."[255]

Though Italian fascism retained its aggression, the press also established that Italy was an ailing "gangster." *The Spectator* went so far as to call the nation an invalid, and *The New Statesman* and *The Times* wholeheartedly agreed.[256] *The Spectator* printed a series about Italy in four installments which analyzed the state after its war with Abyssinia and during its intervention in Spain. The weekly focused on the disastrous state of Italian affairs specifically in the economic sector. Importantly, *The Spectator* emphasized that Italy's "financial straits" were a product of fascist mismanagement occurring "long before Geneva took action."[257] Aside from fiscal troubles, the weekly printed an anonymous letter from an Italian detailing the political crises in Italy on the local level. The writer, calling himself XYZ for protection, noted that little difference existed "between an Italian election and the polling which gave Stalin his smashing victory."[258] Reviewing numerous examples of local governmental abuses, the writer explained that "millions of Italians" "loath and detest methods of the present regime."[259] Congruently, *The New Statesman*, in an editorial entitled "The Weakness of Italy," suggested that "of all the dictatorships Italy economically is the weakest."[260] The weekly blamed the Abyssinian War, the inefficient colonial administration, and the intervention in Spain for draining the Italian state of

[254] *The Times*, 18 June 1937.
[255] Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 508.
[256] *The Spectator*, 31 July 1936.
[257] Ibid.
[258] *The Spectator*, 11 February 1938.
[259] Ibid.
[260] *The New Statesman*, 5 March 1938

its resources.[261] By stating that "a severe fall in the standard of living [was] the first result of the Duce's military adventures," the writers emphasized that fascist expansion was the ultimate burden to Italy.[262] Six months later, *The New Statesman* published another editorial remarking on the current status of the Italian state. However, departing from economics, the weekly suggested that fascism also "induced in Italy a state of intellectual torpor which it is terrible to contemplate."[263] The "years of uncountered propaganda" drained the Italian people of any memory of true cerebral functions such as "reason" or "doubt."[264] Contributing to the discussion, *The Times* covered several trials of anti-fascist intellectuals throughout the years of the Spanish Civil War.[265] The paper, by referring to the unreasonably long prison sentences and other absurdities in the cases, suggested that Italian fascism seemed relatively unstable.[266] For a totalitarian state, Italy seemed unable to maintain its grip on society and frequently made bizarre examples of certain individuals.[267] Additionally, *The Times* often referred to Italian military failures in Spain, such as the rout on the Guadalajara in March 1937.[268] *The Times* and *The Spectator* both resolved that these failures, described as "complete and catastrophic," not only evidenced an "immense drain on Italian resources" but became a detriment to "the military value of Italy" in its alliance with Germany.[269] As Germany swelled in strength and fascism expanded throughout the continent, the press speculated if an ailing ally was any use to Hitler.

Regardless of its increasing antagonism and struggling economy, Italy's position as a potential ally became heavily discussed in the British press by the spring of 1938. As Rome and

[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.
[263] *The New Statesman*, 21 October 1938.
[264] Ibid.
[265] *The Times*, 13 October 1937 & *The Times*, 17 October 1938.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.
[268] *The Times*, 25 March 1937.
[269] Ibid & *The Spectator*, 26 March 1937.

Berlin drew ever closer, Britain rationalized that conversations with Italy could lead to bettered relations with Germany as well as alleviate heightened tensions between Italy and Great Britain. The press uniformly acknowledged Italy's advantageous position in the prickly political circumstances of the Spanish Civil War, despite their sentiments about fascism. For example, *The New Statesman* printed an editorial in April 1938 explaining the benefits of stable relations with Italians.[270] First, the weekly suggested that a formal agreement between the nations would possibly provide for the removal of fascist troops in Spain and the relief of anti-British propaganda throughout the empire.[271] As a result of this agreement, *The New Statesman* hoped Mussolini would serve as the middleman between Britain and Germany.[272] Therefore, the publication envisioned Mussolini "as a neutralizing and balancing force between Hitler and Great Britain."[273] Even though the weekly denounced Mussolini and the tenets of his fascism, *The New Statesman* feared the consequences of rickety relations with Italy and Germany's unbridled, expanding influence. Alert to these same consequences, *The Spectator* printed a similar article a few weeks later. The publication considered Mussolini "an influence for peace" and expected negotiations with the Duce to "have a moderating effect on Herr Hitler."[274] However, the weekly also mentioned that Mussolini must have acknowledged that it would be "his axis-partner and not himself who [was] going to dominate Southeastern Europe."[275] Due to Italy's recent economic decline, the British press, as a group, regarded Mussolini as secondary to Hitler in the fascist bloc, which perhaps would increase his willingness to bargain. *The Times* also recognized the increasing influence of Hitler over Italy, trusting that the Italian people

[270] *The New Statesman*, 23 April 1938.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid.
[274] *The Spectator*, 13 May 1938.
[275] Ibid.

disliked these German "importations" such as the goose-step and anti-semitism.[276] In fact, the British press sensed that the Duce did not particularly enjoy standing behind the Fuhrer. Upon Eden's resignation, *The Times* urged their readers to consider the beneficial outcomes of conversations with the Italians.[277] The paper argued that "Italian demands are not British concessions," and therefore Britain should accept the Italian invitation to consult with no strings attached.[278] However, *The Times* admitted that Eden's resignation signaled the "sunset of British obligations to the international order."[279] Giving full respect to Eden's opinion, the paper expressed subtle apprehension about Chamberlain's policy. The publication noted the Prime Minister would "not take the way of resistance," and perhaps would compromise "principles that are vital to the good name and self respect of Britain."[280] Nonetheless, *The Times* considered a rejection of Italy's invitation hazardous to European stability. By spring 1938, the British press agreed that Britain and Italy should remain on friendly terms for the sake of peace on the continent and throughout the empire.

Six months later, Mussolini's advantageous position at the negotiation table became a reality. In September 1938, the Czechoslovakia crisis aggravated British anxieties shoving Europe to the brink of war. Germany threatened to recapture the Sudetenland by force if Czechoslovakia refused to cede the area and its German-speaking population back to Germany. Upon the Czechoslovakian rejection of Hitler's ultimatum, Chamberlain clamored to arrange a conference between Germany, France, Britain, and Italy to allay the threat of war. Chamberlain

[276] *The Times*, 14 February 1938 & *The New Statesman*, 21 June 1938.
[277] *The Times*, 23 February 1938.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

requested Mussolini's assistance "asking him to use his influence for peace with Herr Hitler."[281] Immediately, Mussolini contacted Berlin and organized a council of four nations to discuss the crisis.[282] *The Times* raved that "the Duce is to be congratulated on the speed with which he acted…"[283] Furthermore, the paper assured its readers, "it is felt that if anybody can save the situation at the last moment by influencing Herr Hitler it is his partner in the Rome-Berlin Axis."[284] Upon hearing the news of Mussolini's arrangement, the House of Commons leapt "to its feet in a storm of cheering."[285] Though antagonistic and ailing, Mussolini's Munich Conference seemingly promised peace.

During the Spanish Civil War, British opinion scattered all along the political spectrum; however, few disregarded the growing threat of fascism in Europe. Therefore, the press, acknowledging Italian antagonism and its weakened stance in the fascist bloc, encouraged the British government to converse with the Italians. Despite Churchill's announcement that "dictatorship – the fetish worship of one man – was a passing phase," the press preferred to stabilize relations with Britain's loudest critic.[286] However, the negotiating did not go as planned. As men and munitions continued to pour into Spain in the name of fascism for another year, the allure of negotiations diminished for many in the press. Furthermore, though Mussolini had demonstrated his influence by arranging the conference in Munich, the outcome was ultimately a failure. Many in Britain acknowledged the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany as an utter betrayal to Czechoslovakia. Ridiculing the appeasement, *The New Statesman* argued that

[281] *The Times*, 29 September 1938.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] *The Times*, 17 October 1938.

"action" was necessary to halt the spread of fascism.[287] As the conflict in Spain quieted, the publication derided Chamberlain, after his meeting with the Duce in January 1939, for virtually consenting "not to squabble when the time [came] for riveting Fascism onto the necks of the Spanish people."[288] This meeting between Chamberlain and Mussolini was arranged to "gratify" the Duce and the Italian people by reassuring them that Britain "entertained no hostile designs against Italy anywhere." [289] In response to its minimal success, *The Spectator* initiated some serious hand-wringing, fretting that Chamberlain was mistaken about Mussolini and that Eden had been right all along.[290] The weekly emphasized that Chamberlain was "going to Rome against the will of half the country…"[291] *The Times* clung desperately to the notion that Mussolini was on the verge of "a fresh start," yet seriously questioned Italian earnestness in their promises of peace.[292] When the war ended and Italian troops remained in Spain, the press clamored to criticize the Government's management of the dictators. The press speculated that appeasement was a temporary fix to the permanent reality of fascist expansion.

In mid April 1939, Italy invaded Albania, violating more treaties than with the Abyssinian invasion.[293] The Good Friday Felony, as it was named by the press, shred the last remnants of trust much of the press maintained in Italy and in Chamberlain's cabinet. In March, Hitler had invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia absolving self-determination in the name of Nazi expansion. *The Spectator* declared that "Italy and Germany ha[d] been planning this for years,"

[287] *The New Statesman*, 29 October 1938.
[288] *The New Statesman*, 21 January 1939.
[289] *The Spectator*, 6 January 1939.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] *The Times*, 27 March 1939.
[293] *The Spectator*, 14 April 1939.

and slammed Chamberlain and his cabinet for being "continually wrong" about the dictators.[294] Because "the cabinet and the Prime Minister drop[ped] back to old facile and baseless optimism," the publication declared that they granted "the dictators…immense potentialities of action."[295] *The Times* admitted that the Albanian invasion had completely "transformed the scene" by pushing Europe farther from peace.[296] The aggressive aftermath in Albania and Czechoslovakia, as well as fascist intervention in the Spanish Civil War, demonstrated fascist aims in Europe, which undeniably existed outside Italy and Germany. However, these crises also launched Hitler's widening influence into British consciousness almost eclipsing anxieties about Mussolini and Italian fascism. Nonetheless, these war costs, in addition to Abyssinia's, torpedoed the Italian economy. Thus, Mussolini, much to his lament, would need to lean on Hitler. In his poem "Benito Mussolini," R. H. Smith illustrated all of these contemporary sentiments:

> He climba up high, He perch on da ped-
> He never believa, Caesar is dead.
> He maka da war, He maka da noise
> He dressa in black, Italio boys.
> He praisa da Bono, He dropa da bomb
> He Spraya da gas, With great aplomb.
> He teacha da nig-, He maka him run;
> He rula da world, Before he's done.
> He nota so good, He shiver and shud-
> He see all da soldiers, Stuck in da mud
> He turna the handle, He look at da monk
> He hava no money, Benito's sunk. [297]

[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] *The Times*, 14 April 1939.
[297] *The Spectator*, 24 July 1936.

CONCLUSION

In 1922, the British press greeted fascism as the efficient solution to Italy's chaos. Clinging to blind optimism after the March on Rome, the press predicted a cessation of violence and interpreted Mussolini's expansionist rhetoric as Italian flamboyancy. However, the violence not only persisted but spilled into Eastern Europe and Africa threatening the stability of the post-war world. In 1936, the Spanish Civil War signaled the strength of the ever-growing fascist bloc. By the late 1930s, the British government ingratiated the dictators, as the British press engaged in a war of words over the dangerous implications of fascism. After witnessing the Government's frail response during the Abyssinian invasion and the Spanish Civil War, much of the press questioned the soundness of appeasement. And yet, the rumblings of appeasement existed throughout the interwar period as evidenced by Great Britain's relationship with Italy. Blindly juggling the consequences of Italian fascism, the British government turned confusion and desperation into an official policy of appeasement. For many, Chamberlain "tore" the shirt made by Mussolini.[298] However, much of the press rejected the fleeting comfort of appeasement embodied in this little ditty.

After the invasion of Albania, David Low sketched a cartoon for the *Evening Standard* featuring Mussolini, Hitler and Chamberlain. Donning a dress and straw hat, Mussolini huddles behind a bush wrapped in a tight embrace with Hitler.[299] Well out of sight, the dictators gawk at

[298] Page, *The Thirties in Britain*. , 14.
[299] *The Evening Standard*, 15 April 1939 in http://opal.ukc.ac.uk/cartoonx-cgi/ccc.py?mode=single&start=4&search=albania%20%20David%20low.

Chamberlain, who sits on an uprooted street sign labeled Albania.[300] Chamberlain, looking like a disheveled peasant who survived a close encounter with a bomb, clutches the remaining fragments of the Anglo-Italian agreement.[301] Fingering each piece, he wonders, "Loves me, Loves me not."[302] Sixteen years before, Low had labeled Mussolini a "war nuisance" in his first cartoon of the Duce. Perhaps feeling vindication, Low, in this cartoon, snickered at the Government's almost compulsive denial of reality. Amidst acts of war on the continent, the British government clung to remnants of appeasement, praying for a peace already trounced. Author George Orwell, who joined the International Brigade to quell fascism in Spain, expressed similar sentiments. He wrote in *Homage to Catalonia* that his contemporaries were "sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs."[303]

[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, 1952), 221.

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