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H.G. Wells's 'Liberal Fascism'

'Is Mr Wells a secret Fascist?' was the ironic question posed in the British Union of Fascists' (BUF) paper *Action*. In fascist eyes Wells was a 'socialist' and, even worse, an 'internationalist', but against the certainty of that knowledge was the perplexing fact that there appeared to be Blackshirts playing the role of Wellsian revolutionaries in the Wells/Korda film, *Things to Come.* The author of the letter which prompted this enquiry regarding Wells's politics noted that 'the supermen all wore the black shirt and broad shiny belt of Fascism! The uniforms were identical, and their wearers moved and bore themselves in the semi-military manner of fascists.' A cinema audience, being familiar with the sight of Blackshirts on British streets for the previous three and a half years, would have naturally been struck in the same way, and 'Observer' wrote that 'all around me last night I heard people commenting on it'.[1]

The only way that the fascists could explain this apparent contradiction was to assume that 'Mr Wells had been caught napping'. John Macnab, reviewing the film for the BUF, mockingly enquired, 'Cap'n Wells, art tha' sleeping there below?'[2] However, this article will argue that the appearance of these mysterious men in black to build the world state was not the consequence of any slumbering inattention on Wells's part but reflected, on the one hand, the long-established Wellsian theory of how the world state would be achieved and, on the other, important changes which Wells's thinking underwent in response to the specific political conditions of the early 1930s. As such this is a study in what I call the 'praxis of desire', in that it examines a theory of the ways and means whereby a desired end may be sought, in this case the Wellsian utopia of the world state or 'Cosmopolis'.

The praxis of desire is necessarily a dynamic thing, evolving in response to changes in the political forces, theories and contingencies of the moment. Thus while, as Warren Wagar's penetrating analysis of Wells's 'Open Conspiracy' has shown, many aspects of Wells's thinking in this area long predated the 1930s, I would suggest that at the same time Wells was additionally and significantly influenced by the new political forces which appeared to be coming to dominance in the early 1930s.[3] In this respect he was not alone: in

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1 *Action*, 28 February 1936, 8.

2 J[ohn] A. M[acnab], 'Things to Come', *The Fascist Quarterly*, 2, 2 (1936), 328–9.

3 W. Warren Wagar, *H.G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven, CT 1961), 164–205.

Britain during this period sections of the Labour Party departed both to the 'left' — the ILP — and the 'right' — Mosley's New Party and then BUF. Prominent intellectuals of the Labour movement, including Wells's old Fabian colleagues Sydney and Beatrice Webb and Bernard Shaw, and younger Labour figures including Sir Stafford Cripps and G.D.H. Cole, either embraced the authoritarian road to socialism or proposed the radical reform of parliamentary democracy. Labour intellectuals George Catlin and Raymond Postgate saw the need for, respectively, 'a voluntary aristocracy of asceticism' and 'an organization of storm-troopers or ironsides' as essential for their party in the new conditions.[4]

The question of whether the writer, social critic and utopian H.G. Wells had 'fascist' tendencies, secret or otherwise, is nothing new. At the time, Dmitri Mirsky and other communists were not slow to include him in their theory of fascism.[5] More recently, Wells the liberal and democrat has been defended against Wells the authoritarian and racist.[6] However, not only was Wells, as at least some commentators have shown, a man of complex contradictions but, as Leon Stover has argued, in Wells's thinking the forces of destruction and creation, darkness and light, are best understood as a dialectical unity.[7] The same paradigm, I would argue, when applied to Wells's theory of revolutionary praxis in the 1930s, shows how he was not forced to be *either* a liberal *or* an authoritarian, but could seek 'liberal' ends by means which were anything but.

The relationship between these two sides of Wellsism is well illustrated by the 'Liberal Fascism' which Wells called for in his address to the Young Liberals at their Summer School in Oxford in July 1932. The reason why he was there,

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4 Sydney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (no place of publication 1935); Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism* (Harmondsworth 1937), vol. 2, chaps 71–85; Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw* (London 1995), chap. 6; Peter Beilharz, *Labour's Utopias: Bolshevism, Fabianism, Social Democracy* (London 1993), chap. 3; R. Bassett, *Essentials of Parliamentary Democracy* (London 1964; first published 1935), part two; G.E.G. Catlin, 'Expert State *versus* Free State', *The Political Quarterly*, 3 (1932), 539–51; Raymond Postgate, *How to Make a Revolution* (London 1934), 194.

5 Dmitri Mirsky, *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (London 1935), 74–7; J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (London 1939), 398; 'Christopher Caudwell' [Christopher St John Sprigg], *Studies in a Dying Culture* (London 1938), 73–95.

6 Anthony West, *H.G. Wells. Aspects of a Life* (London 1984); David C. Smith, *H.G. Wells. Desperately Mortal* (Yale 1986); Michael Foot, *H.G.: The History of Mr Wells* (London 1995); Peter Kemp, *H.G. Wells and the Culminating Ape* (New York 1982); Leon Stover, *The Prophetic Soul: A Reading of H.G. Wells' Things to Come Together with His Film Treatment, Wither Mankind? and the Postproduction Script (Both Never Before Published)* (Jefferson 1987); John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London 1992); Michael Coren, *The Invisible Man: The Life and Liberties of H.G. Wells* (London 1994).

7 Krishan Kumar, *Utopia & Anti-utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford 1991), 178–219; Leon Stover, 'Spade House Dialectic: Theme and Theory in "Things to Come"', *The Wellsian*, 5 (1982), 23–32; Stover, *The Prophetic Soul*, op. cit.

Wells stressed, was to 'assist in a kind of "Phoenix Rebirth" of Liberalism'. 'Central' to this reborn 'Liberalism' would be what Wells called a 'competent receiver', by which he meant 'a responsible organisation, able to guide and rule the new scale human community'. The 'competent receiver' was also, Wells carefully explained, 'flatly opposed' to the norms of 'parliamentary democracy', being a 'special class of people' of the type anticipated in 'the Guardian of Plato's Republic'. 'Concrete expressions of this same idea' included '*the Fascisti* in Italy', Wells believed.[8]

For the 'modernized state' to come into existence, Wells asserted, would require 'the will and the ideas of public-minded, masterful people', formed into 'a militant organisation' which would 'release the human community from the entanglements of the past'. The alternative was for 'civilization' to be left to 'stagger down past redemption to chaotic violence and decadence'. Consequently liberalism, while seeking 'one prosperous and progressive world community of just, kindly, free-spirited, freely-thinking, and freely-speaking human beings', in a world of 'gangsters' also required 'a voice (and a backbone)'. One should add that this Wellsian 'liberal' utopia, with its renunciation of parliamentary democracy, private property and individualism was not the good society as liberals in the conventional sense would have understood it. Thus, in order to seek this 'prosperous and progressive' utopia, liberals had to 'move with the times', discard 'the sentimental casualness of nineteenth-century Liberalism' and transform themselves into 'a Liberal Fascisti'. In so doing, liberalism would become an organization to '*replace* the dilatory indecisiveness of parliamentary politics'. In the same way that 'the Fascist Party, to the best of its ability, *is* Italy now', so 'the Fascists of Liberalism must carry out a parallel ambition on a still vaster scale', Wells declared.[9]

As Wells made clear to his Oxford audience, his search for an active force to realize his utopian vision of the world state was nothing new — he had sought to turn the Fabian Society to that purpose 25 years earlier. Furthermore, during the second half of the 1920s Wells had postulated a means-to-utopia in the form of the 'open conspiracy' of *The World of William Clissold* (1926), an idea he went on to revise and develop through *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for World Revolution* (1929) and then in what he described as 'definitive detail' in *What Are We To Do With Our Lives?* (1931). In this last version, the 'open conspiracy' was cast as an intellectual élite movement which would in time develop into 'a world religion'.[10]

There are suggestions that during the late 1920s the groundwork for Wells's

8 H.G. Wells, 'Project of a World Society', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 20 August 1932; H.G. Wells, *After Democracy: Addresses and Papers on the Present World Situation* (London 1932), 2–3, 9–11.

9 Ibid., 11–12, 17–18, 23–5; emphasis in the original.

10 Ibid., 5; H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* (London 1934), 746; H.G. Wells, *What Are We To Do With Our Lives?* (London 1935; first published 1931), 127.

later view of fascism was already in place. Writing of the Italian fascists in 1928, Wells mused that there was 'considerable reason to suppose that organized brotherhoods, maintaining a certain uniformity of thought and action over large areas and exacting a quasi-religious devotion within their members, are going to play an increasingly important part in human affairs'. Nonetheless, Wells had a fundamental objection to formally organized bodies of the fascist type in that they threatened to displace the solvent power of reason with the charisma of 'leaders'. While Wells could approve of the 'hard but effective life of a young Fascist or Nazi', the cult of personal leadership was a throwback to the automatic, unquestioning obedience demanded by monarchical authority. The member of the Wellsian élite owed allegiance only to the dictates of Wellsian 'common sense'.[11]

Reflecting this, he declared that 'the idea of the Open Conspiracy ever becoming a single organization must be dismissed from the mind'. Even at the moment of its final victory the open conspiracy would be a cultural movement without a centre, being a 'large, loose assimilatory mass of movements, groups and societies' which would finally 'swallow up the entire population of the world and become the new human community'. It was this model of the open conspiracy which appeared in the first edition of Wells's *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* in early 1932. This volume, together with *The Outline of History* (1920) and *The Science of Life* (1930) completed a project to bring 'together a complete system of ideas upon which the Open Conspirator can go' and included what Wells believed was 'an even more explicit statement of the Open Conspiracy plan'.[12]

In June 1932, pressing forward with his argument for the open conspiracy, Wells prepared a 'Memorandum on the World Situation' which he privately circulated among 'a number of public figures in Europe and America'. This sought international co-operation to act against the world economic malaise and to this end argued for 'some force that will jump political boundaries and operate in a world-wide manner'. However, this force was not to be a political movement but the 'few thousands' who could mould opinion through the media organizations of the world, and the heads of state 'who can make statements that will be respected and listened to throughout the earth'. As West notes, Wells 'did not get the response he hoped for, and no general debate took place'. Instead, the next month, in Oxford, Wells changed his approach and appealed to the Liberals to emulate the militarized vanguard party that he had hitherto rejected.[13]

Wells ended his Oxford speech by asking of the 'feeble giant of modern

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11 H.G. Wells, *The Way the World is Going* (London 1928), 28; H.G. Wells, *The Anatomy of Frustration: A Modern Synthesis* (London 1936), 187; H.G. Wells, 'Grown Men do not Need Leaders' in *The Common Sense of War and Peace: World Revolution or War Unending* (Harmondsworth 1940), 7–12.

12 Wells, *What Are We To Do With Our Lives?*, op. cit., 20, 113, 127; Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, op. cit., 746.

13 West, op. cit., 129; Wells, *After Democracy*, op. cit., 234–47.

Liberalism': 'Can he be gingered up?'. H.M. Tomlinson's judgment of Wells's call to the Liberal leader 'Mr Ramsey Muir to be a Black Shirt, or a Nazi at the least' was that the Liberals were 'no more likely to resolve on New Jerusalem for England's green and pleasant land than are the guardians of the home for lost dogs'.[14] And so things turned out, but despite this disappointment, Wells by no means gave up his quest for such a force. Following his speech to the Liberals, Wells drew up a 'sketch of a possible revolutionary organisation' which, like the Open Conspiracy, would be outside established parties, but, unlike that earlier model, would replicate many of the characteristics of existing militarized political movements. As he wrote in the 1934 revised edition of *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, the world situation demanded a 'militant form of the open conspiracy', an 'overt and definite world organization of will and aim'. As has been shown, an authoritarian élite without scruples about using violence was a long-established aspect of Wells's theory of revolutionary praxis, but it was the notion of a formally organized political movement that was the novel element of Wells's approach in the early 1930s which led him to link 'fascist' means to 'liberal' ends. Unlike the old version of the Open Conspiracy, this new force would require 'ordered co-operation and discipline' and, graphically illustrating the nature of this 'new movement', Wells alluded to the 'various "arms", the infantry, air forces, "shock troops"' into which its 'militant members' would be organized.[15]

Having so outlined the Wellsian revolutionary force, at the beginning of December 1932 Wells turned from the Liberals to the Labour movement. First canvassing the opinion of 'sixty to seventy sample people', Wells then issued his call in an article in *The Daily Herald*. Proclaiming the need for a 'Common Creed for Left Parties Throughout the World', his article allowed that while the 'Class War' organizations of the left might create the conditions for revolution, the 'creative motive' in history was to be found 'in a variety of more or less disciplined and instructed associations' which included 'the various Fascist associations'. 'Such "efficiency" organizations' were 'a necessary factor for world revolution', Wells declared.[16]

Despite the comparative radicalism of the Labour Party at the time, Wells's search for recruits for his new movement evoked 'very little response'.[17]

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14 Ibid., 27; H.M. Tomlinson, 'Mr Wells has his Joke', *The New Clarion*, 13 August 1932.

15 Wells, *After Democracy*, op. cit., 31; Wells, 'Project of a World Society', op. cit.; H.G. Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (London 1934; revised edn, first published 1932), 809; Wagar, op. cit.

16 Wells to [Clifford] Allen, 17 December 1932, in David C. Smith (ed.), *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells: Volume 3 1919–1934* (London 1998), 456; H.G. Wells, 'Introduction: There should be a Common Creed for all Left Parties throughout the World', 12–20 in C.E.M Joad (ed.), *Manifesto: Being the Book of The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals* (London 1934), 17–18.

17 Wells dismissed the readership of the *Daily Herald* as 'stupid'. See Wells to Joad, 14 December 1932 (Smith, op. cit., 455). In another letter he described what correspondence he had aroused by his article as 'idiotic' and commented that 'nobody else has taken notice of what I have said' (Wells to Allen, 17 December 1932, ibid., 456). On Clifford Allen's unsuccessful attempts

However, while drawing another blank, he believed that his ideas were growing 'more precise'.[18] He also seemed to have more success with another organization around this time, as Kingsly Martin recorded in October 1932 that the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI) had recently 'sprung up under Mr Wells' inspiration'.[19]

With regard to the success of this engagement between Wells and the 'Progressives', it was true that the FPSI, some months after its inception by C.E.M. Joad, had redrafted its 'basis' into the clearly Wellsian form which then appeared in the organization's book, *Manifesto,* in 1934 and that Wells's *Daily Herald* article appeared in the same text as well. However, things were not necessarily as they seemed. A leading member of the organization later recalled that

> . . . some months after the inception of the F.P.S.I. the society made a bid for the support of Mr H.G. Wells. Mr Wells responded to the tune of a donation of £20 and the grant of the permission to include his name in the list of vice-presidents . . . but made the redrafting of the basis . . . a condition of his support.

In light of this, the FPSI was 'presumably a Wellsian body'. However, J.B. Coates recalled that 'the original acceptance of the Wellsian basis was half-hearted' and Joad himself had opposed its acceptance, which had been secured by a single vote. In view of this, it was not surprising that 'as an organisation pledged to propagate the Wellsian world view' the FPSI 'show[ed] a lukewarm spirit and a conspicuous lack of drive'. Although Wells continued as a nominal vice-president of the organization until he finally fell out with it towards the end of 1943, it seems likely that he disregarded the FPSI as a force towards world revolution much earlier. It was almost certainly the FPSI that Wells had in mind when he wrote of 'The New World Society' in his 1939 text, *The Holy Terror*, which, unlike 'Rud Whitlow' and his 'Purple Shirts', were 'barely cryptic nudists', 'extremely woolly vegetarians', 'flimsy people' and 'not the stuff revolutions are made of'.[20]

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to interest Wells in participating in a public meeting to bring together 'progressive' opinion see Arthur Marwick, *Clifford Allen: The Open Conspirator* (Edinburgh 1964), 125–6; Martin Gilbert, *Plough My Own Furrow: The Story of Lord Allen of Hurtwood as Told through his Writings and Correspondence* (London 1965), 291–3; 307–9. Wells's involvement in the Next Five Years Group which emerged from Allen's efforts in 1935 was limited to allowing his name to be included in the list of the signatories to its programme (*The Next Five Years: An Essay in Political Agreement* [London 1935], ix).

18 Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, op. cit., 748.

19 Kingsley Martin, 'Mr Wells and Sir Oswald Mosley', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 29 October 1932.

20 Jack Coates, 'Is the Progressive League Redundant?', *Plan*, 12, 5 (May 1945), 2–4; *Plan*, 11, 3 (March 1944); Wagar, op. cit., 198; H.G. Wells, *The Holy Terror* (London 1939), 73, 82.

Thus, despite considerable effort and an enviable access to the means of propaganda, Wells's attempts to mobilize his ideas via an effective political organization had failed utterly. Nonetheless, his writings provide ample indication of what he was seeking. In *The Shape of Things to Come,* Wells wrote that he had 'contrived to set out . . . my matured theory of revolution and world government very plainly'. In this 'sociological novel' Wells began his narrative among the actual events of the contemporary world and then laid out an imagined history of a future of slump, chaos and then world war in the coming decades. It was out of the ruins of the old world that the vanguard of the new, the 'Modern State Movement', emerged. This élite, made up of the surviving airmen and technicians of the world, transformed it in accordance with the Wellsian blueprint with a 'pitiless benevolence' and few scruples. Finally, its work complete, this stern élite conveniently retired, leaving a society no longer needing a coercive state at all, as a place where 'liberty increases daily'.[21]

In this way Wells showed how 'fascist' — that is élitist, authoritarian and violent — means, could yield 'liberal' ends. *The Shape of Things to Come* was also understood by Wells as a discussion of '*contemporary* revolutionary forces in the form of anticipating fiction'. Writing the year after the publication of *The Shape of Things to Come,* Wells saw it as a culmination of a dialectic between theory and events since his writing of *Anticipations* at the turn of the century: 'Step by step through that logic in events, the new pattern of revolution has been brought from Utopia and from the vague generalisations of the New Republic into contact with contemporary movements and political actuality', he wrote. Wells made clear that it was events which had forced a major shift in his theory of revolution, writing of the interwar period that by the time of *The Shape of Things to Come,*

> . . . the artificiality and unsoundness of those boom conditions had become glaringly obvious. . . . The Open Conspiracy of William Clissold was essentially speculative, optional and amateurish; the Open Conspiracy of De Windt which took possession of the derelict world, was presented as the logical outcome of inexorable necessity.[22]

This text thus also signalled changes in Wells's thinking on fascism. As late as 1930 — as Michael Foot has pointed out in defending his hero against 'Fascist libel' — Wells had put forward an anti-fascist line in *The Autocracy of Mr Parham*, which charted the rise and fall of 'Mr Parham' and the 'The Duty Paramount League' as, respectively, 'The English Duce' and 'the Fascisti of Britain'.[23] Three years later Wells was articulating a positive — albeit importantly nuanced — view of contemporary fascism.

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21 Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, op. cit., 748; H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come: The Ultimate Revolution* (London 1936; first published 1933), 270, 312.

22 Wells, *The Anatomy of Frustration*, op. cit., 275, my emphasis; Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, op. cit., 749.

23 Michael Foot, 'In Defence of H.G. Wells', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 October 1995; H.G. Wells, *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* (London 1930), 153.

Not without accuracy Wells portrayed the 1930s as seeing 'the conviction that Parliamentary democracy had come to an end spread everywhere'. However, rather than this being a disaster, this environment fostered the emergence of the crude prototypes of the 'Air Dictatorship' and 'Modern State Movement' which would remould the world into the Cosmopolis. Speaking in the voice of the text's historian of the future, Wells wrote of the reaction against democracy that:

> At its first onset this craving for decisiveness produced some extremely crude results. An epidemic of tawdry 'dictatorships'. . . . But there followed a world-wide development of directive or would-be directive political associations which foreshadowed very plainly the organization of the Modern State Fellowship upon which our present world order rests.[24]

Wells went on to specify the regimes which anticipated the new political order, writing that:

> The Fascist dictatorship of Mussolini . . . had something in it of a more enduring type than most of the other supersessions of parliamentary methods. It arose not as a personal usurpation but as the expression of an organisation with a purpose and a sort of doctrine of its own. The intellectual content of Fascism was limited, nationalist and romantic; its methods, especially in its opening phases, were violent and dreadful; but at least it insisted upon discipline and public service for its members. . . . Fascism indeed was not an altogether bad thing; it was a bad good thing; and Mussolini has left his mark on history.[25]

The ambivalence that Kemp detects in Wells's personal simultaneous rejection of and attraction to individual pre-eminence is also apparent in his attitude towards the fascist leader. Priestley recalled arguing 'in the later Thirties against both Shaw and Wells, who were declaring that Mussolini was a very great man, far greater than Napoleon', and even during the war years Wells threaded amidst his criticism of Mussolini the assertion that the Duce was 'immensely energetic, with the energy not of morbid concentration but physical abundance. He is what many men would like to be.' When seeking a contemporary parallel of the 'drive' of the 'chief figures of the Air Dictatorship' it was to 'Mussolini, the realizer of Italian Fascismo' with his 'single-handed accomplishment and . . . disinclination to relinquish responsibility' that Wells turned.[26]

Bridging the gap in *The Shape of Things to Come* between the actual movements of the time and the fictional Modern State Movement, Wells wrote that 'millions of young men who began Fascist, Nazi, Communist . . . became Modern State men in their middle years'. As this last quotation suggests, it was not only fascism which Wells saw as anticipating the vanguard movement he desired. He also noted that 'in Russia something still more thorough and

24 Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 106.

25 Ibid.

26 Kemp, op. cit., 178–80; J.B. Priestley, *Margin Released: A Writer's Reminiscences and Reflections* (London 1963), 164; H.G. Wells, *The Outlook for Homo Sapiens* (London 1942), 111; Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 283.

broader came into operation after 1917' and approved of 'the modernity of many aspects of the early Bolshevik régime'. This echoed the fact that in his approach to the Liberals and the Labour movement the previous year he had called for 'a sort of Liberal Communist Party *or* a sort of Liberal Fascism'; 'a Liberal Fascisti, for enlightened Nazis . . . a greater Communist Party'; and had grouped together the 'more or less disciplined and instructed associations from the Communist Party to the various Fascist associations'.[27]

'The Communist Party' and the 'Italian Fascisti' both shared Wells's approval to the extent that they represented 'that germinal idea of the Modern State, the Guardians in Plato's *Republic*'. However, this did not mean that he saw them as being equally close to the ideal Wellsian political movement. In this regard it is of the greatest significance that Wells's approval was of the '*early* Bolshevik régime' of Lenin for, by the early 1930s, Wells had accumulated a weight of criticism of the communist movement that effectively displaced his former approval of Lenin's party. The early party had been acceptable because it replaced the mysticism of 'the version of deified democracy, the Proletariat' with an authoritarian élite. However, against this he saw the 'heavy load of democratic and equalitarian cant' which 'ordained that at the phrase "Class War" every knee should bow'.[28]

The ideal Wellsian revolutionary was the man (sic) of reason, a type in the modern period which included 'teachers of every class, . . . writers and creative artists, . . . scribes and journalists, . . . doctors, surgeons and the associated professions, . . . judges and lawyers generally, . . . administrators, and particularly that most excellent type the permanent official, with technical experts, and finally, most hopeful, various and interesting of all, with the modern scientific worker'; whereas the communist doctrine of 'class-war', Wells believed, obstructed the employment of 'the most characteristically modern types in the community' and caused 'its inability to assimilate competent technicians, organizers and educators'. When he met Stalin in July 1934, the year after the publication of *The Shape of Things to Come*, prominent among the points Wells made to the Soviet dictator was that it was 'useless' to approach 'engineers, airmen, military-technical people' with 'class-war propaganda'. Without this group there could be no basis for the essential '*competent receiver*', communism might be able to seize power via the insurrectionary 'class-war' but would be able to do nothing with it. The 'weak point in communist proposals', Wells argued, was 'that they do not clearly indicate a competent receiver'.[29]

By raising the proletariat to supremacy, Wells saw that communism, rather than being progressive, was actually reactionary. Proletarians were not

27 Ibid., 321, 106–7; Wells, 'Project of a World Society', op. cit., my emphasis; Wells, *After Democracy*, op. cit., 24–5; Wells, 'Introduction', op. cit., 18.

28 Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 107–8, my emphasis.

29 Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, op. cit., 315, 326; Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 108; *The Stalin–Wells Talk. The Verbatim Record and a Discussion by G. Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, J.M. Keynes, Ernst Toller and Others* (London 1934), 8.

modern-minded but, possessed of 'their own distinctive modifications of the narrow peasant psychology' which reacted against 'the methods and machinery of modern production, against social discipline and direction', they were 'much more disposed to hamper and break up the contemporary organisation altogether than to reconstruct it'. In addition, Wells reacted strongly against the part that the peasant played in Soviet Russia. According to his pseudo-biological typology of human 'personas', the peasant was ineradicably acquisitive and superstitious and in the Soviet collectives Wells condemned 'the old sentimental unwashed sweating "democratic" side' of socialism, 'all natural virtue, brotherhood and kisses', 'Rousseauism pretending to love machinery and taking it to pieces out of sheer childishness, misusing it and destroying it'.[30] Strong hints of Wells's antisemitism were also apparent in his description of the Communist Party as 'that band of Russian Jews'.[31]

Wells's view of Stalin and of the direction the Soviet regime was taking was also important. Wells believed that the early twentieth century had seen the opening of 'the epoch of dictatorships and popular "saviours" '.[32] However, not all forms of authoritarian rule were equal in his opinion. Because Wells firmly and consistently believed that the cult of the leader displaced the force of reason, what was important in the modern form of dictatorship was not the person of the leader but the organization he led. On the one hand, Wells believed that fascism in Italy was not reducible to Mussolini, writing that 'if he were to die, Fascism would not have the least difficulty in finding a . . . successor'. For all its emphasis on leadership, fascism was 'only *apparently* a one-man tyranny'. On the other hand, 'the persistent weeding out of his rivals and critics by Stalin' was 'rapidly reducing the party control in Russia to a personal absolutism'. By this 'degenerative process', the modern, and to Wells thus acceptable elements of Lenin's original vanguard party were being exchanged for an old-fashioned form of reactionary tyranny. 'Stalin, who has succeeded the scientific-spirited Lenin, seems to possess all the vindictive romanticism of a typical Georgian', Wells wrote. In this way Stalin belonged to the second reactionary 'class of persona' which 'fundamentally . . . despises work', is 'fierce' and 'romantic', and glories in 'waste', an ancient rather than modern form, being the 'disposition of kings, aristocrats, soldiers and ruling classes since the social world began'.[33]

In the future history of *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells projected his conclusions about Stalinism into the future, writing that because of the 'ineradicable democratic taint of the Soviet system' there was 'the widening estrangement of the Russian process from Western creative effort'. Wells

30 Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, op. cit., 184–5, 538.

31 Wells, *After Democracy*, op. cit., 26. On Wells's antisemitism see: Bryan Cheyette, 'Beyond Rationality: H.G. Wells and the Jewish Question', *The Wellsian*, 14 (Summer 1991), 41–64; Kemp, op. cit., 181–3; Coren, op. cit., 211–19; Stover, *The Prophetic Soul*, op. cit., 50.

32 Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, op. cit., 540.

33 Wells, *The Way the World is Going*, op. cit., 28, my emphasis; Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, op. cit., 312, 540, 584, 614.

imagined a future in which 'at every point where constructive effort was made the nagging antagonism of the Class War fanatic appeared, to impede and divide'. He dismissed the Soviet system as 'a politician's dictatorship, propagandising rather than performing, disappointing her well-wishers abroad'. It 'seemed to lead' but 'lied', he declared. Even at the moment when the Communist Party basked in the reflected glory of the Red Army's victories against fascism, it, along with Wells's other hate object, the Church of Rome, was 'the right hand and the left hand of what is fundamentally the same enemy' which fought 'mental liberation tooth and nail'.[34]

Fascism, although more free of 'democratic taint' and the 'elderly methods of parliamentary democracy' was not pure either, being infected with the 'poison of nationalism'. However, Wells's discussion of 'contemporary revolutionary forces in the form of anticipating fiction' found that it was fascism rather than communism which offered a glimpse of 'the shape of things to come'. The course of the world war which Wells prophetically imagined breaking out in 1940 demonstrated that 'the old enthusiasm for Revolution had faded out of the Russian imagination'. In contrast, 'the Central Powers were all of the new Fascist pattern, more closely knit in its structure and dominated by an organisation of the younger spirits which claimed to be an élite'. Wells continued: 'Except for the fundamentally important fact that these Fascisti were intensely nationalist, this control by self-appointed, self-disciplined élites was a distinct step towards our Modern State organisation.' The Wellsian voice of the historian of the future approved of the fascists as:

> . . . noteworthy . . . for their partial but very real advance on democratic institutions. Amidst the chaos, that organized 'devotion of the young' on which our modern community rests was clearly foreshadowed. . . . The idea of disciplined personal participation in human government was being driven into the mentality of the new generation.
>
> Until something more convincing appeared, it had to crystallise, disastrously enough, about such strange nuclei as the theatrical Mussolini and the hysterical Hitler, it had to be patriotic because that was the only form in which the State then presented itself. But after these first crystallizations had been shattered and dissolved in the war . . . the idea was still there, this idea of banded co-operation ready to be directed to greater ends. Youth had ceased to be irresponsible in all the Fascist countries.[35]

It was thus fascism which, of all extant political movements of the 1930s, came closest to the 'aggressive order of religiously devoted men and women who will try out and establish and impose a new pattern of living upon our race', which Wells appealed for in the final line of *The Shape of Things to Come.* Geoffrey Gorer noted in 1935: 'Mr Wells thinks that he hates fascism; he is horror-struck as any liberal at its brutality, its barbarism, its philistinism,

34 Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 108–9; H.G. Wells, *'42 to '44: A Contemporary Memoir upon Human Behaviour during the Crisis of the World Revolution* (London 1944), 68.

35 Wells, *The Anatomy of Frustration*, op. cit., 275; Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 109, 163.

its illogicality and its narrow nationalism; but he puts all the blame on the last quality; if it was only international it wouldn't really be so bad.'[36]

It was not only in *The Shape of Things to Come* that Wells hinted that he saw his 'modern state movement' anticipated in the fascist movements of the day. It was a message that he also put forward in 1936 in the *Anatomy of Frustration*. Wells, speaking through the medium of a fictitious author, wrote that 'Steele' 'blamed the liberal type of mind for gentleness, for fastidiousness, for obscurity of thought and expression, for pedantry and needless dissensions, for mutual distrust'. Wells had written earlier of the 'Modern State Fellowship' of 'varied technicians' originally banding together in 'protective and aggressive gangs' and 'Steele' 'looked with envy at the working solidarity of the . . . gangster régimes in various European countries'. Drawing on the 'experiences of Jesuit and Puritan, Communist and Fascist, for direction in the New Beginning', Wells imagined a 'New Model' of liberalism to replace the 'undisciplined and uncoordinated liberalism'. Once again, Wells distinguished between 'piecemeal-socialism' and fascism. Socialism had 'projected a new sort of society' but without the 'new sort of head' of the 'competent receiver', but at the same time 'the discursive human intelligence, in its subconscious realization of these . . . deficiencies, was . . . busy producing . . . a series of rough experiments in directive control of such impatient, cruel and incalculable gang tyrannies, for example, as the Fascist and Nazi organizations'.[37] Two year later, in his novella *The Brothers*, in which two long-separated identical twins are reunited, of the two, it is 'Bolaris' on the 'right' who has sought to weld his party into an 'operative form'. The 'operative form' is synonymous with the '*competent receiver*' which, as Bolaris says to his socialist twin Ratzel, 'came from someone on your side'. In contrast, Ratzel and his followers are condemned as 'just a crowd of empty *antis* — without a creative idea in common'.[38]

In *Things to Come* — in which the stages of the Wellsian revolution were turned into film for a mass audience — Wells once more drew the line between reactionary dictatorship and 'modern' fascism, directing that the character 'Boss' who comes to dominate the devastated 'Everytown' was 'not intended to be a caricature of a Fascist or Nazi leader. He is as much South American or Haytian or Gold Coast. He is something more ancient . . . and more universal than any topical movements.' Wells also guarded against any suggestion of

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36 Ibid., 333; Geoffrey Gorer, *Nobody Talks Politics: A Satire with an Appendix on Our Political Intelligentsia* (London 1935), 199.

37 Wells, *The Anatomy of Frustration*, op. cit., 89–90, 189–90; Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit., 122. Wells apparently preferred the fascist to the nazi regime. Writing of the 'very full and well-illustrated Italian (Fascist) Encyclopaedia', Wells described it as 'one of the many evidences of the higher mental level of the Fascist as compared with the Nazi regime'. Wells also noted the 'highly disciplined Fascist Legislature, in which Fascists only may be elected'. (Wells, *The Outlook for Homo Sapiens*, op. cit., 276; Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, op. cit., 613.)

38 H.G. Wells, *The Brothers: A Story* (London 1938), 44–7; emphases in original.

fascism in the salutations of the Boss's followers, directing that there was to be 'no hand lifting'.[39]

Aside from these subtleties, which were lost on many critics and probably the majority of the audience, the major link between the 'Airmen' who bring the Wellsian revolution, and fascism, was their black uniform. Mellor has suggested that the costume of the Airmen deliberately drew on fascist 'iconography of the future' and indeed notes 'the transparent overlay of Raymond Massey/John Cabal/Oswald Mosley'. Whether this link was deliberately intended by Wells is unclear. Given the considerable attention that Wells devoted to the symbolism of scenery, props and costume in the film, these uniforms were certainly no accidental choice. Stover's interpretation that the shift from the black attire of the Airmen to the white of the rulers of the new Wellsian world symbolizes the 'destruction–construction dialectic' is convincing. At the same time, to suggest that Wells did not anticipate the inference that an audience would much more readily draw on seeing 'the New Airmen in their black costumes' implies that his powers were truly failing.[40] Whatever Wells's precise intention, the Airmen expressed the ideal of the militant, organized élite that he approved of in contemporary fascist movements.

In Wells's *The Holy Terror* (1939), his final study of the ways of the Wellsian revolution before the war, there was no element of doubt concerning this linkage of fascism to Wellsian revolution. Wells based the action of the novel in the political scene of the England of the 1930s and it was not to the Communist Party of Great Britain to which he turned. Instead it was the BUF, albeit thinly veiled as the 'Purple Shirts' of the 'Popular Socialist Party', who under the leadership of 'Rud Whitlow' threw off their narrowly nationalistic ambitions to become a world state movement. Whitlow, as means to the Wellsian utopia, has been described as 'a paradox . . . which no commentator has yet satisfactorily explained'. The story of *The Holy Terror* was perhaps paradoxical from a viewpoint of Wells as a conventionally democratic liberal or socialist, but rather than turning 'Wellsian ideas on their head', it was fully logical in relation to Wells's praxis of desire as laid out here.[41] By naming

39 H.G. Wells, 'Wither Mankind? A Film of the Future' in Stover, *The Prophetic Soul*, op. cit., 137.

40 Elizabeth Coxhead, 'Things to Avoid', *The Left Review*, 2, 6 (March 1936), 275; F. McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells* (Oxford 1981), 213; David Mellor, 'British Art in the 1930s', 185–207 in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex 1980), 189, 204; Christopher Frayling, *Things to Come* (London 1995), 17–18, 45–6; Stover, *The Prophetic Soul*, op. cit., 51–5, 77, 84, 90; Stover, 'Spade House Dialectic', op. cit., 28, 23; H.G. Wells, 'Wither Mankind?', op. cit., 157.

41 Brian Ash, *Who's Who in H.G. Wells* (London 1979), 265–7; see also Norman Nicholson, *H.G. Wells* (London 1950), 87; J.R. Hammond, *An H.G. Wells Companion: A Guide to the Novels, Romances and Short Stories* (London 1979), 217–19; Kemp, op. cit., 193–4; Smith, op. cit., 352. See also: Wagar, op. cit., 199; John Batchelor, *H.G. Wells* (Cambridge 1985), 142–3; Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Life of H.G. Wells: The Time Traveller* (London, revised edn 1987; first published 1973), 416–19; Coren, op. cit., 202. *The Holy Terror* is the one text which Michael Foot completely ignores in his otherwise comprehensive coverage of Wells's novels of the 1930s.

Whitlow the 'Holy Terror', Wells was probably articulating the same undesired, but regrettably necessary synthesis as he did with 'liberal fascism'. Whitlow is at one and the same time both 'The Stink' and the 'Superman'; contemptible and dangerous, but necessary; not important in himself as a leader, only as the mediator of the higher 'common-sense of mankind'; he, like the 'Modern State Movement' in *The Shape of Things to Come*, is a necessary transient evil. Wells also expressed the same qualified approval of Mussolini as in *The Shape of Things to Come*, making clear where he stood in relation to the ideal Wellsian figure to come: the Italian fascist leader was 'a minor Holy Terror, an opera-tenor Rud'.[42]

Returning to real politics, the actual BUF was launched at the very moment in 1932 when Wells was seeking a political movement to press forward his purpose. Nor was the idea of the BUF — which put itself forward as a 'Modern Movement' and as the handmaiden of 'the new world of science' — necessarily so strange in this role. Mosley, a wartime pilot, was happy to see himself described as an 'ex-airman', and many of his supporters were aviators, including Geoffrey Dorman, editor of *Aeroplane*, A.V. Roe, pioneer pilot and founder of the AVRO aircraft firm and P.P. Eckersley, RFC veteran, leading expert of the new technology of wireless, and a correspondent with Wells. Later on, and reflecting this interest in modern technology, the aircraft in *Things to Come* was a matter of some debate among 'air-minded' fascists in the pages of *Action*.[43]

Nor were Wells and Mosley strangers. Mosley later recalled playing Wells's 'childish but most enjoyable ball game in his house near Easton Lodge' and they co-existed in the same privileged social universe. Mosley dined alongside Wells in parties including Keynes and Harold Nicolson in May 1931 and Charlie Chaplain in October that year.[44]

In *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* published in mid-1930, Wells had paid Mosley ('Sir Osbert Moses') the compliment of singling him out from an unflattering portrait of the Labour Party by picturing him as 'pleading in vain with a sheepish crowd of government supporters for some collective act of protest' against 'Lord Paramount's' forced dissolution of parliament. Acting very much in the style of his fictional alter ego, Mosley resigned from his post

42 Wells, *The Holy Terror*, op. cit., 268–70, 437–41.

43 Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London 1932), 125; Oswald Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London undated; ca.1936), preface; Myles Eckersley, *Prospero's Wireless: A Biography of Peter Pendleton Eckersley Pioneer of Radio and the Art of Broadcasting* (Romsey 1998); David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Basingstoke 1991); Colin Cook, 'A Fascist Memory: Oswald Mosley and the Myth of the Airman', *European Review of History*, 4, 2 (1997), 147–62; Kemp, op. cit., 170–3. Fascist discussion of the aircraft in *Things to Come* evoked a response from Nigel Tangye, 'aeronautical adviser to Mr Alexander Korda and Mr H.G. Wells' (*Action*, 24 October 1936).

44 Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London 1968), 226; Harold Nicolson, *Diaries & Letters 1930–39* (no place of publication 1969), 70, 91.

as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 20 May 1930 over the Labour government's rejection of his efforts to spur it into action against the mounting crisis of unemployment. In February 1931 he resigned from the party itself to found the New Party. Before the formal launch of this new force, Mosley sent Wells a proof copy of its *National Policy* which, developed from the 'Mosley Memorandum' which Labour had rejected, appeared under the names of Allan Young, John Strachey, W.J. Brown and Aneurin Bevan. Mosley referred to Wells's open conspiracy in his accompanying letter, explaining that the *National Policy* 'represents our conversion to a point of view which you reached a year or so ago; that is to say that the only chance of successful progress in this country is in the co-operation with the more intelligent, at any rate, of the big business people'. Mosley anticipated that Wells would not 'agree with all we say' but was 'tremendously interested to hear what you think of the thing as a whole'. Later that year, when the Propaganda Committee of the New Party discussed the coming campaign for the Ashton-under-Lyne by-election in April, Mosley suggested that 'he would personally seek out G.B. Shaw, H.G. Wells and other intellectuals to seek their support'. No such support seems to have been given before the New Party's unsuccessful intervention at Ashton-under-Lyne, but later that year, on the day Wells had agreed to write 'an article on class distinctions' for the New Party's weekly *Action*, Harold Nicolson, its editor, wrote to Mosley that Wells had expressed 'serious interest about the policy' of the party.[45]

No such article ever appeared. Nicolson recorded that Wells was 'a trifle tipsy' at the time of his request, so perhaps, when sober, he withdrew his offer, or it may simply have been that the short life of *Action* allowed insufficient time. Alternatively, the explanation may lie in Wells's disenchantment with Mosley after meeting him approximately ten days later at the time of the crisis which led to the creation of the National Government. Both men were holidaying in the south of France at the time and Wells drove over from his home in Grasse to visit the Mosleys in Antibes. Vera Brittain, who recorded Wells's account of the meeting, wrote that the Mosleys, when asked for their response to the crisis 'seemed unable to think of anything except whether Mosley . . . ought to sit on the front Opposition Bench & what should be the colours of the Mosley party'. 'So Wells', Brittain wrote, 'taking their mentality at the level it appeared incapable of surpassing, solemnly discussed with them the importance of "making a corner" in flame-colour before some other party appropriated it.'[46] Whether it was Mosley's parliamentarianism *per se* or his

45 Wells, *The Autocracy of Mr Parham*, op. cit., 164; Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London 1990; first published 1975), 199–282; Wells Archive, Mosley to Wells, 14 February 1931. I am grateful to the University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign for copies of this and the letter cited below (note 47); Eckersley, op. cit., 335; Nicolson, op. cit., 85; Nicolson to Mosley, 14 August 1931 quoted in Nicholas Mosley, *The Rules of the Game* (London 1982), 195–6.

46 Vera Brittain, *Diary of the Thirties 1932–1939: Chronicle of Friendship* (London 1986), 92–3; entry for 5 October 1932.

apparent preoccupation with its superficial details which disgusted Wells is unclear.

However, this episode did not mark the final break between the two men. Mosley recorded meeting Wells once more when — probably around the time of the launch of the BUF — the former was 'listening to marching songs for the new movement' and in August 1932, a short time before the formal founding of the BUF at the beginning of October, Mosley wrote to Wells enclosing a pre-publication copy of *The Greater Britain*. At the time, Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador to London, who was then deeply involved with Mosley, reported to Mussolini that Wells, although previously an enemy of fascism, was proposing 'un nuovo "fascismo"' as a solution to Britain's national ills. Mosley wrote to Wells that he had 'read with great interest a speech by you asking for a "Liberal Fascism"' and went on to explain that while 'the word "Liberal" had not much relation to' *The Greater Britain,* Mosley's proposals did represent 'an attempt to create a scientific Fascism which is free from the excesses and repression of the Continent'. As in his letter the previous year, Mosley once again linked his project to Wells's thinking, commenting that 'like most prophets, you will probably have the unpleasant experience of recognising many of your own teachings of the past reproduced and reshaped by less capable hands'.[47]

Given that both men shared a fervent enthusiasm for science and impatience with, and rejection of, parliamentary democracy, it should not be a surprise that Mosley sought to interest Wells in the new movement he was founding. What Wells's response was to Mosley's letter is unknown, but his reaction to a major BUF rally held in the Albert Hall in spring 1934 signalled an unambiguous rejection. Mosley's rally, held where Wells, four years earlier, had imagined Mr Parham holding a similar event, made that fictional episode 'seem preposterously sane and sound' in comparison. Of the Blackshirt leader Wells pronounced: 'I have met Mosley intermittently for years, as a promising young conservative, a promising new convert to the Labour party, with communist leanings, and finally as the thing he is. He has always seemed to me dull and heavy, imitative in his politics.' Wells attacked 'our own little black head, Mosley', not only on account of his intellect, but also imputed doubt about the fascist leader's war record, criticized his oratory and mocked his appearance. When writing *The Holy Terror* four years later, Wells attacked Mosley — if anything, even more fiercely — in the form of 'Lord Horatio Bohun' and, significantly, a successful coup against Mosley/Bohun was the prerequisite for the transformation of the 'Purple Shirts' into a Wellsian vanguard. The years did not diminish Wells's animus against Mosley and, in 1942, amongst the 'bag of problems' which would face the Wellsian revolutionary, was 'Sir Oswald Mosley'. When Mosley was released from wartime internment on health reasons, a particularly hysterical piece from Wells in *The*

47 Mosley, *My Life*, op. cit., 226; Public Record Office, GFM 36/141, Grandi to Mussolini, 13 August 1932 (I am grateful to Stephen Dorril for this reference); Wells Archive, Mosley to Wells, 31 August 1932.

Daily Worker spoke of Mosley as having 'the characteristic sadistic streak' of fascism and stated that 'to condone him is to condone essential evil', and proposed that 'shooting or hanging of a few of the more flagrant fascists, not for their opinions but for their activities, would have had a very wholesome effect'.[48]

Wells's splenetic response to Mosley may have been fuelled in part by the envy on the part of the rotund, squeaky-voiced and ageing Wells of what even many of his opponents allowed was the tall, eloquent and handsome Mosley. However, any such personal antipathy aside, there were fundamental intellectual reasons for the incompatibility of the two men's approaches and goals. Kingsly Martin, reviewing *The Greater Britain* in tandem with Wells's *After Democracy* in 1932, found that:

> Superficially there is a certain resemblance between their doctrines. Both Mr Wells and Sir Oswald Mosley describe themselves as revolutionaries: both regard our present Parliamentary system as a ludicrous anachronism, both aim at the formation of a corps of young people pledged to the fulfilment of a single social ideal. Sir Oswald declares that it would be dishonest to describe his movement as anything but Fascist. . . . Mr Wells is willing to describe the members of his new society as Liberal Fascists or Communist Revisionists or enlightened Nazis. They are both 'planners', both contemptuous of the old party game and of *laisser faire*.[49]

'But there', the review continued 'the resemblance ends abruptly.' While 'Mr Wells's society may not acknowledge allegiance to any unit smaller than the world . . . Sir Oswald's Fascists are to be concerned solely with cultivating nationalism.' This was sufficient reason for an irrevocable incompatibility between Wells and fascism. Thus, in *The Holy Terror* the 'Purple Shirts' had to lose their nationalism to become an acceptable Wellsian force with — for followers of an ideology centred on nationalism — an unconvincing ease.

Quite possibly Wells's reaction to Mosley and the BUF also signalled a moment when he came face to face with the uncomfortable actuality of things which were more easily accepted in the abstracted space of the imagination. However, even on the page unresolved tensions between Wells the 'liberal' and Wells the 'fascist' were visible. Shifting from the voice of the 'future historian' narrating *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells commented in his own voice of a 'distaste . . . as ineradicable as it is unreasonable' aroused by the actions of the Airmen, and continued that 'but for "the accidents of space and time" ' he would have 'been one of the actively protesting spirits who squirmed in the pitilessly benevolent grip of the Air Dictatorship'.[50] The reality of an actual

48 Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, op. cit., 501, 782–3; H.G. Wells, *Phoenix: A Summary of the Inescapable Conditions of World Reorganisation* (London 1942), 56; *Daily Worker*, 7 December 1943; later published as a *Daily Worker* pamphlet: *The Mosley Outrage* (London 1943).

49 Martin, 'Mr Wells and Sir Oswald Mosley', op. cit., 517–18.

50 Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, op. cit.

fascist movement could only have been more distasteful to the 'liberal' side of Wells's personality.

Every theory of praxis reflects what are understood as the most practical means to achieve a desired end. However, pragmatism in pursuit of a desired utopia can only go so far before contradicting a political ideology's core aims and values and becoming self-defeating. Perhaps, in facing the reality of fascism, Wells might also have received the unwelcome intimation that his whole idea of a 'liberal fascism' was an impossible synthesis, akin, as John Hargrave wrote, to 'an attempt for tepid boiling hot water' or 'harmless poison gas'. Mosley described his intention to Wells as being to create a 'Fascism which is free from the excesses and repression of the Continent' but achieved the bloody scenes of the fascist rally at Olympia and a mean and vicious antisemitism. In all probability, a 'liberal' Wellsian utopia could also only be achieved by 'fascist' means in the space of Wells's imagination and in its projections onto paper and celluloid. As R.H. Tawney noted of the contemporary scene: 'Mr Wells's vision of a world controlled by Samurai and airmen is the only utopia which has approached realization. It is still uncertain whether mankind can survive it.'[51]

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51 John Hargrave, '"A Liberal Fascisti"', *The New Age*, 25 August 1932; Wells Archive, Mosley to Wells, 31 August 1932; R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London 1964; first published 1931), 189.