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Fašista. Příběh sira Oswalda Mosleyho

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The rise of undemocratic political movements in Europe is one of the main topics of the twentieth century historical research. Fascism, which is one of them, is usually associated with Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany. However, the expansion of the oppressive regimes was much wider. It was possible to find supporters of the ideology in some other European countries, even on the opposite side of the Atlantic. In Great Britain, the phenomenon is traditionally connected with the name of an aristocrat and a politician Oswald Mosley.

The author of the biography of this controversial figure is a Slovakian historian Jakub Drábik, who is active also in the Czech Republic. The evolution of fascism is one of his main long-term research areas, the author focuses especially on the fascism in Britain and British fascist movements and their leaders. In his doctoral thesis, he pays attention to Mosley's British Union of Fascists.¹ He also wrote papers on subsequent aspects of British fascism, but the reviewed title is the most detailed one.

The focus of the book is the life of Oswald Mosley, the descendant of an old noble family. His early life in instable family environment is an important part of the biography because the author shows there the psychological premises for Mosley's later political career and also his controversial attitudes. Mosley's childhood was not idyllic. On the contrary, it was full of conflicts with his relatives, mainly with his father who suffered from alcoholism. During his studies at boarding school and even at the Military Academy, Oswald Mosley had also serious problems with authorities and at some occasions, he tried to solve his conflicts with violence.

Even in the Mosley's early life period, the author sees great ambitions and superiority over other people, a sort of conviction that he had been predestined to rule the country and to solve political problems in a better way than the mainstream politicians. Drábik also tries to illustrate his psychological state of mind, presenting a brief personality profile based on several studies in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis (e.g. p. 38). It is almost clear that Mosley's psyche,

¹ J. DRÁBIK, *Mýtus o znovuzrození: Britská unie fašistů a její propaganda*, Praha 2017.

and apparently his mental health, was not entirely without complications, as it is evident in other parts of the book, such as in the paragraphs on the relationships with his colleagues, friends and family, especially his wife – a daughter of the famous diplomat and cabinet minister Lord Curzon. In my opinion, the strong statements on psychological qualities and disorders of the long-deceased personalities, not based on relevant psychological examination, is very problematic and should be viewed with suspicion.

Oswald Mosley's political career was not aimed at proclaiming extremist ideologies from the beginning. Actually, his political activities began in a very usual way, similar to other major political figures. Mosley had started his political career in the Conservative Party and he even entered the Parliament. In the Parliament, he focused on speeches and he was quickly improving. At the time, he had already gained the respect of many of his colleagues in the Conservative Party and also of the public. Many of them prophesied him bright future. However, it was clear soon that the success would not arrive among the Conservative MPs. Mosley began to disagree with the crucial steps of the conservative government, and later, he began to openly criticize the cabinet policy. A good example is the criticism of the infamous units known as Black and Tans, which were sent to Ireland to tranquillize the Troubles. Of course, these speeches caused a wave of discontent in the party. In the end, Mosley left the Conservatives.

Mosley tried to act as an independent MP for some short period – and he was quite successful. He even won another election without any political party background. Nevertheless, he had ambition to enter the Cabinet or to become the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, it was impossible to achieve the positions without a party membership. The Liberal Party was in decline so he joined the growing Labour party with Ramsay MacDonald in charge. The author describes Mosley's activity in the Labour Party and his ideological evolution. Appropriate space in the book has been given to the analysis of Mosley's proposals, which were focused mainly on the economy. The politician has shifted considerably to the left and towards some type of socialism. However, the author rightly states that the seeds of fascist opinions on the economy and the functioning of states can be identifiable well in this period. Proposals for anti-crisis economic reform had visibly diverted from the classical liberal economy concept which prevailed in Labour Party policy during this period, mostly because of Philip Snowden's influence. Snowden was also Mosley's greatest and the most powerful opponent. Although Mosley's economic ideas did not find much popularity in the party, he was promoted to the Government. Nevertheless, the position was not attractive enough for the ambitious politician and did not provide him much influence. After some time, Mosley left the Labour Party as well. In the Government, he was replaced by later leader Clement Attlee.

Other parts of the book are devoted to the gradual shift of Mosley towards the extremism. The author describes the emergence of an authoritative party and movement which was always based only on Mosley's personality. After the founding of the British Union of Fascist (BUF), other activists, unknown politicians and publicists with similar or even more undemocratic and racist views started to join Mosley. Drábik describes in great detail the functioning of the movement, Mosley's megalomaniac plans, and his gradual move from the classic political work towards riots, violence and intolerance. Several pages are also devoted to violent clashes with the anti-fascists, which occurred as a side effect at the fascist rallies. Mosley himself was not involved in clashes, but on the other hand, he was not trying to prevent them.

Very useful are the chapters which analyse Mosley's opinions and relations with various fascist states. It is clear that he admired both Mussolini and Hitler. The Italian leader even financially supported his movement and used BUF's influence to moderate the situation in the international politics. As an example, Drábik mentions the Italian-funded BUF campaign, which discouraged British revenge against Italy, which had invaded Abyssinia. The German Nazis watched closely the British fascist movement, but they had more reserved attitude to financial help. This, however, did not prevent Adolf Hitler from being one of the few guests at Mosley's second wedding which took place in Germany.

The author argues that the British

fascists protested against the war with Germany. Mosley called for the signing of a separate peace treaty between Britain and Germany after the start of World War II. However, there is no evidence that he had the intension to collaborate with the Nazis if the invasion to the British Isles were successful. On the contrary, he argued that if the Germans attacked Britain, the members of the BUF will fight to the end against the invasion. Despite of his proclamations, he spent preventively most of the war in prison.

Drábik has dedicated the final chapters to Mosley's work after the end of the war, which, however, had very little response in Britain. He kept trying to export his ideas of Europeanism (but in the fascist manner) to Europe. Only his moderately written memoirs gained limited public attention and invitation to BBC for an interview.

In his monograph, Jakub Drábik offers a comprehensive view not only of Sir Oswald Mosley's personality, but also of the whole phenomenon of British fascism. The reader will also appreciate a description of the domestic and foreign politics that influenced the situation of Mosley's undemocratic movement. The book is based on a huge amount of resources, written both by Mosley and his family, as well as his contemporaries, supporters and opponents. Worth mentioning is a surprisingly critical biography written by Mosley's son Nicholas.² On the

² N. MOSLEY, *Rules of the Game: Beyond the Pale: Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, Elmwood 1991.

other hand, the author evaluates the work of the renowned historian Robert Skidelsky³ as a less objective.

In my opinion the monograph has been successful, especially for a comprehensive analysis of Mosley's per-

sonality, and also for the description of the most important moment of British fascism. Given the lack of Czech-published works focused on British history, it will certainly benefit both historians and the professional public.

³ R. SKIDELSKY, *Oswald Mosley*, New York 1975.

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