It is about time, I proceeded, that some public spirited person came along and told you where you got off.
The trouble with you, Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone.
You hear them shouting, Hail, Spode, and you imagine it is the voice of the people.
This is where you make your bloomer.
What the voice of the people is saying is, look at that frightful ass, Spode, swanking about in footer bags.
Did you ever in your path see such a perfect perisher?
That Dominic was a Bertie Wooster philosopher and political analyst in PG Woodhouse's The Code of the Woosters, which he wrote in 1938, and Sir Roderick Spode, who's the kind of bogeyman in the Bertie Wooster stories, is a not so subtle portrait of Sir Oswald Mosley, who is the leader of the black shirts, so hence the black shorts that Spode wears.
The end of the first episode that we did, we were looking at the roots and the kind of the first immergings of British fascism, and you left it on this cliffhanger saying that British fascism needed a plausible leader, and it finds it's plausible leader, or is he plausible?
I mean, we can discuss that in the form of Sir Oswald Mosley, who is, as you said, at the end of the episode, previous episode, a fascinating character, a very sinister character.
You can see, just to repeat what we said in the last episode, you can see him being interviewed on ITV in the 1970s.
It's very, very odd.
He's a remarkable character, and as you say, a much more complicated and fascinating individual than I think many people realise, so you hear the name fascist and you think just a sinister pantomime villain, Mosley is not a pantomime villain at all.
The one thing I will say, however, is that that brilliant reading made me realise for the first time the true nature of the rest of history dynamic.
You are Bertie.
And you're Jeeves.
Has that not occurred to you before, Tom?
Alternatively, of course, I could be Bertie and you could be Gussie Fink-Nottle.
I think I'm more Gussie Fink-Nottle.
You're Gussie Fink-Nutes.
Yeah, but you want to be Gussie Fink-Nottle for crickets, aren't you, and Gussie doesn't like crickets.
No, there's the vicar, isn't there, the curate, who's awfully good at cricket.
Is he Stilton Cheesewright?
No, Stinker Pinker.
Stinker Pinker, of course.
Stinker Pinker, very good.
This will mean nothing to people who've never read PG Woodhurst.
It will amaze people to know that we like PG Woodhurst.
They would never have anticipated that.

So, Oswald Mosley, yes.
So at the end of the last episode, we talked about how British fascism got to the end of the 1920s.
All the ingredients, in some ways, are there.
I mean, Britain, of course, hasn't lost the First World War, which is a huge...
It's a plus.
Yeah, it's a plus for Britain, a minus for, if you're a fascist.
But the anti-Semitism, the anxiety about Bolshevism, the belief that Britain has become corrupted, the distrust of democracy, parliamentary democracy, all of those ingredients are floating around, not just politically, but they're in the imaginal imagination in John Buchan and Anacleta Christie and Bulldog Drummond and all these things.
But they lack the front man, and the front man they're going to find is Oswald Mosley.
Now, Mosley, as I said, is a really remarkable figure.
He was born in 1896, and he comes from a kind of family of kind of Staffordshire landowners.
So that's in the West Midlands for those people who are not from Britain.
That's where the Holland's come from.
That's where the Sandbrooks, it's not far from where I grew up.
His mother has a family home in Shropshire, my home county, but Mosley spends most of his time at his grandfather's house, which is Rollston Hall in Staffordshire.
His grandfather, Tom, was supposed to look just like John Bull and was in fact called John Bull.
His grandfather was nicknamed John Bull.
And young Sir Oswald, or Tom as his friends and family called him, you know, in that sort of way that British aristocracy did in the early 20th century.
Yeah. So like Boris Johnson was called Alex by his family.
Well, his name was Alex.
I mean, he was Christend Alex.
So young Tom Mosley, he grows up there.
His mother and father had parted company when he was five.
So he doesn't he has his grandfather, John Bull, but he doesn't have a father figure and he's a very spoiled little boy.
His mother, we talked in the last episode about Rota Linton Orman, the founder of the British Fascists.
She was called the man woman.
Well, Oswald Mosley's mother called him her man child.
And to some extent, I think there's an argument by Robert Skadelsky, his biographer, that he remained a man child all his life, this sort of spoiled brat, the Peter Pan of mid war British politics.
But I think there is an element to that, Tom.
He's impatient.
He's in he's he wants everything now.
He won't take no for an answer.
And as we will see, those things lead him into progressively more and more trouble become Captain Hook to become Captain Hook.

Very good.
So he goes to Winchester College, Rishi Sunak's old school.
He's a very tall, sporty kind of person.
He's he's quite a loner.
And he's quite haughty.
People say of him at school that he sort of keeps himself to himself and he thinks himself better than the other boys.
He's a brilliant fencer.
So he wins the public schools fencing championship in both foil and saber.
And had he not been injured in the First World War, his biographers say it's plausible he would have won the World Fencing Championship.
He goes to Sandhurst military training school for officers in the early 1914 when he's 17 years old.
He has a fight at Sandhurst with some other boys, young men, and he fractures his right ankle.
And this is the first in a series of breaks that will end up leaving him with this limp.
So he then when the war breaks out, he joins the Royal Flying Corps, gets a pilot's license and he's showing off at an sort of airshow type of demonstration in front of his mother in 1915 when he crashes his plane and breaks the same ankle.
So he breaks it again.
But then because of the demands for men in the First World War, he's sent to the trenches before his leg has properly healed.
And he spends months in the trenches under fire.
But eventually he is evacuated, sent home for operations on this leg, which hasn't healed properly.
They save his leg, but he is left with a permanent limp.
That is, by the way, a great asset to him.
It means he has a genuine kind of war wound, a very visible war wound, but there's not otherwise incapacitated him.
And that experience of war generally is immensely important for Mosley.
So Robert Skidelsky, his biographer, I think we're talking a little bit about Robert Skidelsky's biography in this because Lord Skidelsky, as he now is, is most famous as the biographer John Maynard Keynes.
And his biography of Mosley, the first to take Mosley seriously, torpedoed Skidelsky's academic career.
He has denied tenure at Johns Hopkins University in the United States because his biography was seen as soft on Mosley.
And he never got a job at Oxbridge for the same reason, so he is a professor at Warwick.
And he's one of Britain's most eminent public intellectuals.
But because he took Mosley seriously, and he said, he's not just a villain, there's lots of interesting things.
And he was really strong on Mosley's relationship with the economist John Maynard Keynes and the links between Mosleyism and Keynesianism.
Is that what made him interested in?

Yes, I think it is.
I think it is, exactly.
So Mosley is of all fascist leaders, I think by far the most interesting.
And he is a sinister man, but he's clever, thoughtful in a way that is not true necessarily, I mean certainly not true of Hitler and not true of Mussolini.
So Mosley comes back from the war and he's very typical of lots of young men of his generation of his class.
Paramount Millen is a really good example of the British Prime Minister in the 50s and 60s.
Anthony Eden actually as well.
Clement Attlee?
Well, Clement Attlee, to some degree, I guess, Clement Attlee injured in Mesopotamia, major Attlee.
There is this whole generation of young men who come out of the war, they want a new start.
They are really full of dissatisfaction when they get back to Britain.
Not the same kind of dissatisfaction as the John Bucking here as we talked about in the last episode.
But resentment of old men, isn't it?
The old men.
The old men who sent us to war and are still running the country, Lloyd George, the corrupt old men, all of these people.
So Mosley comes back and he's fired up with that and he's also fired up with a sense of brotherhood that so many people have from the trenches.
The same kind of brotherhood that you see reflected actually in the Lord of the Rings or something, J. R. R. Tolkien, Frodo and Sam.
Mosley comes back, he's obviously still got all his kind of aristocratic connections.
He becomes a very popular guest at the sort of dinner parties and salons in London.
He asked Lady Colfax, Lady Cunard and he's a Philanderer.
So Mosley slept with the hostess and was taken up by the politicians.
This was the period of his apprenticeship, his substitute for a university.
As his confidence grew, the seduced turned into the seducer.
The conqueror of the bedroom became the cocket of the platform.
So he's a great hit at these parties and he's taken up by the conservatives and he becomes the conservative candidate for Harrow in 1918.
He says right at the time, he says, my policy is socialistic imperialism.
So it's a very kind of red tourism.
He actually has red posters, red rosettes and he wants lots of state control of things, real break with kind of laissez-faire conservatism.
The conservatives are really in flux at this period.
So nobody really notices, it's fine, he can get away with it.
He goes into the commons, he's the baby of the house, said the youngest member.
He's only 22 and he straight away gets a reputation as a very sort of slashing speaker.
His maiden speech is an attack on Winston Churchill, who's got two jobs and he says, you can't reasonably have two jobs, minister of war and minister of air.

He's keen on feminism, so he's kind of forward thinking and modern.
He sets himself up as the spokesman in Britain,
the political spokesman for the younger generation and he's very articulate.
This is 1919, but where lest old age steal back and rob you of your reward,
lest old dead men with their old dead minds,
embalmed in the tombs of the past, creep back to dominate your new age,
cleansed in the blood of your generation.
So that's him sort of speaking to youth and that stuff about cleansed in the blood.
Of course, that sounds very sinister to Aries now.
We might say, ah, there's a sign of the fascism,
but I mean, people are talking like that all the time in 1918, 1919, 1920.
He marries really well.
So about the time that he's making that speech,
he meets Lord Curson's daughter, Cynthia, or Simi, as she's known.
Lord Curson, the former vice-roy of India.
Very big man and conservative.
Great enthusiasm for the Taj Mahal.
Great enthusiasm for the Taj Mahal, quite right, Tom.
A most superior person, Lord Curson,
the most superior person on the planet in his own estimation anyway.
Can't open a window.
So if he wants the window open,
throws logs out through the pane of glass.
Yeah. So to marry Lord Curson's daughter is a very impressive thing.
They marry.
It's a sign of Moses' importance at that point,
his connections, that the king is there, George V, the queen is there,
the king and queen of Belgium are there.
So presumably these are Curson's guests rather than Moses,
but even so, it's a remarkable thing.
Moses is never faithful to his wife.
He's still messing around with married women at all these political salons.
And there's a wonderful story that in 1933,
he told another very rake-ish MP, Robert Boothby.
He says to Boothby,
I've come clean to Simi, I've told her about all my other women.
And Boothby said, all of them, Tom.
And Moses said, well, all of them except her stepmother and her sister.
I see.
I'll see you.
But hello, Tom.
That's Terry Thomas.
And Terry Tom, there is a bit of the Terry Thomas about him.
Me?

So Oswald Mosley.
An adorable group of French maids.
What were they thinking?
Right.
If you don't know who Terry Thomas is,
so that will be all of our overseas listeners.
Just Google him.
Tom's impersonation actually is quite good,
but I think we don't want to...
No, I was doing that.
That was the guy from the fast show.
So it's an impression of an impression.
Right.
It was an impression of an impression, yes.
At the end of 1920, Mosley leaves the Conservatives.
He walks out to the Conservative Party.
And actually the breach is because he attacks them
about the use of the blackened tans, the auxiliaries in Ireland.
That is ironic.
To fight, yeah.
The use of paramilitaries effectively.
So he's opposed to the use of paramilitary forces.
Correct.
And the funny thing is, you see, Mosley at this point is a very...
He is modern.
He is progressive.
He is forward thinking.
Well, fascism is modern as well.
Isn't it?
Well, this is the thing.
And British fascism, I think, is unusually modern
by the standards of European fascism in the 1920s and 30s.
So actually you don't get as much of the medievalism,
the sort of the faux archaic stuff.
So that's why there's no King Arthur, which we talked about.
Right.
In the previous episode.
So first he's an independent,
spends some time as an independent,
and then he basically decides he's going to join the Labour Party.
This is not that unusual.
There was quite a lot.
I mean, Martin Pugh, who wrote Who Are for the Black Shirts,
he wrote a history of the Labour Party,

and one of his really big and interesting points
was about the crossover,
not between Labour and the Liberals,
but between the Labour and the Tories.
But there were quite a lot of people
who moved from the Tories into Labour in the 1920s,
including lots of working-class voters,
Stanley Baldwin's son.
Clement Attlee came from a Tory family,
not a Liberal family, a Tory family.
So there were a lot of people who thought
the Liberals are kind of high-minded, vegetarian,
weedy...
Prune juice drinkers.
Prune juice drinking bookish people.
And actually, I'm a patriotic working man,
or champion of the working man,
the working man's pint, the empire, all of that kind of thing.
But I believe that the miners should have better wages,
and mostly joins the Labour Party,
and the Labour Party are delighted to have him.
They are thrilled.
There's a wonderful description in Martin Pugh's book
of him going to a big Labour Party meeting.
2,000 people there, mostly goes onto the platform.
The crowd of Labour Party supporters
sing for he's a jolly good fellow.
A lady in furs, an elegant lady in furs,
gets up to give a speech of introduction,
and a whisper goes around.
Lady Cynthia, Lady Cynthia Mosley,
Lord Curson's daughter.
They love it.
They can't get enough of this.
Mosley is a big star.
So when he's doesn't join Labour,
70 Labour constituency parties ask him to be their candidate.
He's a fighter.
He chooses Birmingham, the home of populatorism,
because he wants to stand against Neville Chamberlain.
And he loses by only 77 votes in the Chamberlain stronghold
in Birmingham, the absolute heartland
of kind of working class true blue conservatism.
That makes his name.

People say, my God, he took on the toughest fight,
and he almost won it.
So he then gets a seat in Smedic in the West Midlands,
and he is an absolute star.
He's very prominent in the Labour Party.
It's like Enoch Powell's seat.
Enoch Powell's seat is in Wolverhampton.
Smedic is very, very close,
just a few miles away in the Black country.
But Smedic is famous because there was a by-election there
in the 1960s with a racist campaign.
So mostly there he is, this MP from Smedic.
He throws himself into Labour Party politics.
He tours the slums.
He goes and visits coal miners.
He goes to mining villages all over Britain.
He gives donations to miners who've been on strike.
He's very close to the miners leader Arthur Cook.
He goes to India.
He goes to the United States.
He goes fishing with Franklin D. Roosevelt
in the United States to pick up ideas.
He's elected three times to the National Executive
of the Labour Party, the NEC, 1927, 28, and 1930.
And he will end up falling out with the Labour Party.
But not because he's too right-wing.
Quite the reverse in some ways.
In 1925, Mosley had written a book or co-authored a book
by a friend of his called John Strayke,
a member of the Labour Party, called Revolution by Reason.
It was an economic book that, as Robert Skidelsky says
in his biography of Mosley,
anticipates what John Maynard Keynes is going to say
about the right economic formula
to ensure a successful prosperous society.
And so invest money in public works and so on.
Invest money in public works, fight unemployment,
create demand.
There's not enough demand.
People don't have enough money
to join in the new emerging consumer society.
That's why there's so much unemployment.
If you create demand, if you put money in people's pockets,
then they will go out and spend,

and that will create this kind of virtuous circle.
So this is a very simplified version of Keynesianism.
And Skidelsky says of Mosley's ideas,
it was a precise foreshadowing of the Keynesian philosophy
of demand management.
They minus the theory that justified it.
Now, he comes up with this in Britain,
because in Britain, unlike in the United States,
unemployment is really high in the 20s.
So by 1930, unemployment had gone up to 2.5 million,
which is about 16% of the workforce.
So much higher.
It's one reason why the depression
is not so much a shock in Britain,
because actually Britain's kind of been in this mess
all along since the end of the First World War.
Labour get-in in the 1929 election, Ramsey MacDonald.
But Ramsey MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party,
and the people around him,
are economically much more conservative than Mosley.
They don't believe in borrowing and spending
lots of money on public works.
They believe that it's the job of a Labour Party
to show that they're responsible
by running the economy in the sort of rigorous
conservative way that a Tory government would have done.
And in February 1930, Mosley writes this memorandum
called the Mosley Memorandum,
which most historians, lots of historians
of early 20th century Britain would say
is one of the absolute kind of landmark,
most fascinating documents.
Because it's a really detailed blueprint,
far more detailed than anything produced
by any other fascist leader,
calling for basically a complete Keynesian model
for the British economy.
So he wants an inner,
a sort of inner cabinet of experts from industry
and economics professors and businessmen and stuff.
He wants an economic general staff run by Keynes,
that will plan the national economy and the national interest.
He wants to borrow and spend £200 million on public works
to create jobs for people, all of this kind of stuff.

And actually what it anticipates is the New Deal.
So for our American listeners, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.
But does it not also,
it anticipates what will become Nazi economics?
The idea that you don't depend on economic policy
for elected politicians because you can't trust them.
You have a sense of what is good for the nation
that is divorced from parliamentary politics?
A little bit, yes.
Funnily enough, Tom, the emphasis on experts
is a very fascist thing.
So the idea that you bring in disinterested people,
not tainted, as you say,
not tainted by parliamentary politics,
not corrupted, they will come in and they will plan the national economy.
That's something that lots of people in Mussolini's Italy
would have said, oh, we've been doing this for years.
And this is also something that people involved
with Roosevelt's New Deal would say,
who are obviously not fascists,
but are interested in what Mussolini is doing,
they would say, yeah, this makes sense.
Set up a big board of experts.
Five-year plans are all the rage in the Union.
But you also have this on the right.
And again, you have the sense that for parliamentary democracies,
fashion is moving against them on both the left and the right, the flanks.
I think that's right, that this is the future.
This is the future.
Mostly takes it to the old men in the Labour cabinet,
and they say, no, we don't like it.
It takes it to the whole meeting of the Labour Parliamentary Party,
and they back the leadership, not him.
But interestingly, a couple of the people who do back him,
two of his chief supporters, one of them is Stanley Baldwin's son, Oliver Tom,
who we've talked about before.
Another one is now secular saint for the British left,
and Iron Bevan, founder of the National Health Service.
He also backs Mussolini and says, his way is the way to go.
But Mussolini doesn't get his way.
So he doesn't immediately walk out of the Labour Party,
but he's gearing up for a strop.
He is.
He goes to the Labour Party conference,

and his plan is defeated by 1.2 million votes to 1 million votes.
These are big votes controlled by the trade unions often.
But he still wins election to the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party
at that late stage.
However, because his memorandum hasn't been accepted,
because he is a bit of a spoiled brat,
because he is impatient, the man-child, and sick of the old men, all that stuff,
he flounces out of the Labour Party.
And in February, 1931, with backing from the car manufacturer William Morris,
so he ends up founding the famous, in Britain anyway, famous,
and a Nuffield Charitable Enterprises, or the Nuffield Hospitals,
and the Nuffield Studies, and all that sort of thing.
With backing from Morris, he sets up a new political party,
not the British Union of Fascists, but it is called, excitingly, the New Party.
So, at that stage, Baldwin's son is one of his backers.
Baldwin's son supports him, and he has a bit of a Baldwin son,
then later reverses and goes back into the Labour Party.
And at that point, even at that point, when they had New Party meetings,
they are harangued by hecklers.
Now, that, by the way, is absolutely standard in British politics in the 20th century.
This isn't something that came in with fascism,
that always been rowdiness and punch-ups and heckling and shouting at political meetings.
It was established for political parties to have stewards
who would kind of get stuck into the hecklers.
And even at this point, Mosley has a group of people who are called the Biff Boys.
And these are the ones who are trained by the England rugby captain, is that right?
Yeah, so the England rugby captain, Peter Howard, is one of his supporters.
There's also a boxer called Kid Lewis, who is one of his supporters.
And they're kind of, you know, having punch-ups with communists
and people who are still in the Labour Party who are shouting at Mosley during these meetings.
But his timing is terrible, because in 1931, British politics is overcome by
complete crisis, complete financial crisis.
The Labour cabinet splits irrevocably, and the King, George V, broke as a deal
where a rump Labour government led by Ramsey MacDonald
will get into bed with Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives and part of the Liberal Party,
so a national government. And they go to the country in October 1931,
and they win the biggest victory in the history of British politics.
The rest of the Labour Party who are against the national government are reduced to 52 seats.
The national government, dominated by Baldwin's Tories,
went pretty much all the other seats. And the new party wins just 0.2% of the vote,
and it's utterly overwhelmed. And so Mosley, who's floundered out of the Labour Party,
struts out, one might almost say.
Right, yes, I was surprised you don't say he's goose stepped out of the...
He's walked out of the Labour Party, he looks like a fool now.

That said, he doesn't have to become a fascist.
So lots of people, he's still having dinner with people like...
Dinner parties with Churchill, with Lloyd George,
with lots of people who like... They like an eccentric, they like a character.
And both the Conservatives and the Labour Party would be very happy to welcome him back.
But Mosley has got it into his head that by forming this coalition, this national government,
they have signed their own death warrant, that they will fail to deal with the economic crisis,
they will be overwhelmed, and that some opposition force, the voice of the new generation, will come
in and sweep everything up and take over. And he thinks that will be him, and that is what impels him to found another new party. And that's the new party we'll be talking about, Tom, after the break.
Okay, we will be back very soon.
Tom Mosley is a cad and a wrongan. That, Dominic, as I'm sure I don't need to tell you,
is Stanley Baldwin's impression of Tom Sir Oswald Mosley.
Baldwin, who we have described perhaps as the embodiment of parliamentary democracy
in this period, and this coalition government that's been stitched together from
Rump of the Labour Party, Liberal MPs, and the mass of the Conservative Party.
I guess on one level, it could be cast as the will of the British people, this enormous,
overwhelming democratic mandate that it's had. But I guess if you're on the fringes, if you
despise all the various leaders of these parties who've come together, you would say that it's
representative of the bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy. Do you think that's how Mosley feels?
Oh, absolutely, it is. And actually, I like the fact that you introduced it with Baldwin,
because you could take Mosley and Baldwin as polar opposites here. Mosley is charismatic,
dashing, flamboyant, handsome, a man who loves the limelight. And he looks at Baldwin,
and he says, a little man, a nothing, an empty suit, Mr. Boring. Of course, Baldwin,
Uxorious, God fearing, praise on his knees every night,
sees himself as the sort of embodiment of national small sea conservatism. He looks at Mosley,
and he says, for all his gifts, he is a terrible bounder. He's a philanderer, he cheats on his
wife, he cheats on his friends, Mosley can't be trusted. So they are kind of polar opposites in
that way. And of course, there are more, there are more Baldwin's in Britain than there are
Mosleys, it's fair to say. So Mosley goes off at the beginning of 1932. He goes to Italy, very bad
move, because he absolutely falls in love with what he sees in Italy. The fascist dignitaries,
they show him around, they say, look at all these public works, all the stuff that you wanted to do
in Britain and with the night. Canesianism, exactly, exactly. He meets Mussolini, he considers
Mussolini charming. Mussolini actually says to him, I'm not sure that Britain will really go for kind
of your, you know, that kind of fascism. You know, it's not as militaristic as, you know, so Mussolini
is not a complete fool, but Mosley is completely in love with Mussolini. Mussolini is everything he
wants to be, the voice of the youth, the voice of the personification of vigor and dynamism and
stuff. And he comes back to Britain, suffused with excitement. He's also got a new relationship,
hasn't he, Tom, that I know you're very excited about.
He has, so he has met with Diana Mitford, who is the most beautiful, the most glamorous,
the most sophisticated star of the social scene. She is the brightest of the bright young things.
But let's not dwell on her and what happens with that, because we'll save that for

our fourth episode, which will focus on the Mitfords.
Do you know, when people say, she was the most beautiful girl in England, I always think, what, you've seen them all? I mean, anyway, I don't want to be too skeptical about the Mitfords too soon, Tom, because I want to save that for episode four.
So October 1932, Mosley launches his new party, the British Union of Fascists.
You know, extraordinary rhetoric, better the great adventure, better defeat, disaster, better by far the end of that trivial thing called a political career, than posturing and strutting on the stage of little England amid the scenery of decadence.
So this is the kind of, this is his appeal. Interestingly, when he launches it in 1932, there is no mention of the Jews at all. So he hasn't identified the Jews as his enemy, despite the example of Hitler. But of course, he's not that bothered about Hitler.
Hitler hasn't come to power yet, has he?
Hitler hasn't come, exactly. Hitler has not yet come to power. Much bigger for Mosley is his pal, Mussolini, who he thinks is the, you know, he is the big man. He rather, you know, he doesn't really is not as interested in Hitler.
Well, I was just wondering, I mean, Mussolini is, of course, a militarist.
He does love posing in the uniform. And if Mussolini concede that the idea of posing in the uniform might raise problems for the British, why doesn't Mosley? Because he goes for his black shirts and everything. Yeah, Mosley goes for the black shirts. I think he thinks that the spirit of the trenches has, he thinks that that will have tremendous appeal to younger voters.
You know, he's obviously been profoundly affected by his time in the First World War.
And I think he thinks, actually, you know what, a uniform gives us a sense of identity, a sense of glamour, all of this sort of stuff. So obviously, the black shirts come from Italy.
You know, it's the Italians who'd worn black shirts first. And I think he, I mean, the very fact that he calls his party the British Union of Fascists, he's perfectly happy to admit his debt to Italy. And the very first symbol they adopt is the Fascades, which is then replaced with a lightning bolt, isn't it, on a Union Jack.
And even at this stage, actually, those sort of weird eccentric people that we were talking about in the first episode who had been Fascists in the 1920s, a lot of them are very suspicious of Mosley. And they say that he's not really a Fascist. You know, he's not anti-Jewish enough.
He's been an MP. He's part of the old corrupt gang of politicians.
You know, he's not, he's not extreme enough, actually, for them. I mean, Mosley's party, when he first launched this in 1932, it is fascinating because it makes a big effort to appeal to women, makes a big effort to appeal to the working classes. And it's not, you said about the militarism, he's not proposing to invade anybody or go to war with anyone, quite the reverse. He says the lesson of the First World War is, you know, never again.
So, actually, that slightly messes with your, with one's expectation of Fascism.
Right. But that just, again, I mean, I understand that, that there is absolutely a weirdly, a pacifist strain to it. Certainly, I mean, he's, you know, he will present, there's certainly the buildup to the Second World War, and then during the Second World War itself, he will present himself as a leader of the peace party.
Yeah.
But that just makes it all the odder that he doesn't, I mean, he's a very smart guy. If Mussolini can see that the going for the uniforms might be a problem, why doesn't he?

I think a lot of people said to Mosley that he, I mean, that thing about him being like a child,
he lacks any self-awareness, and he is drunk with his own excitement. Does that make sense?
Yeah, it does, because obviously, there is a sense of excitement about it.
He loves the show.
So is that what it is, the theatricality of it?
Oh, the theatricality is really important to him. He wants to be the star. He wants to put on
these great theatrical spectacles. He's buoyed up by the excitement of the crowds,
and action, he believes in action.
I mean, remember we did the podcast, Tom, with Lucy Hughes Hallett,
about the Italian poet and proto-fascist Gabriele Dononcio.
Yeah, and the fascination that people had of that generation,
I mean, Dononcio is an early generation, but all the people that he has influenced,
the fascination with action, fighting, violence, blood, all that stuff.
I think Mosley has all that.
He sees himself as a romantic hero of a great adventure story, and the uniforms,
the trappings of militarism, he has a fascist defense force, 300 men, most of them were recruited
from among the unemployed. They're put up in a kind of barracks. They wear britches. They wear
leather boots and all these kinds of things. All that, which we now see, of course, you were
saying before about not projecting our own, what we know. We see all that as incredibly sinister,
understandably, and some people at the time saw it as sinister,
but lots of people didn't think it was sinister. They thought this is an attempt
to preserve the camaraderie, the loyalty, all those things that we knew in the war.
There is a massive but, which is that Mosley is up front about saying that parliamentary democracy
has run its shop, that it should be abolished, that it should be long in tooth and claw.
Yeah, he does say that. He wants parliament. Parliament would still exist, but it would be,
people wouldn't be elected by constituencies. They would represent groups. They'd be like
housewives, representatives, and they'd be representatives of small shopkeepers.
Coal miners, exactly. It'd be a kind of corporate state. He has a very complicated blueprint,
probably the most elaborate of any fascist blueprint for a kind of corporate state.
They still have the king. The king would have more power. The king would be kind of
choosing from among the various experts and all that sort of thing. I mean,
the idea that George V will go for this is obviously completely bonkers, because George V
is so conservative. But that's what we'll maybe discuss. Maybe one of his sons will come for that.
Yeah, you're right. So who does go for this, then?
He makes a big effort among ex-servicemen. The thing is, when they get all these ex-servicemen,
the descriptions of them that we have from other fascists that basically these ex-servicemen,
people called Sid or something, they just sit around in the headquarters drinking tea and
feeling miserable and talking about the battle of Luce or something. So there's a slight sense of,
I mean, basically, if you're a successful person with lots going on, you're probably not going
to join this kind of slightly eccentric party. So the people who are looking for something,
looking for a purpose, looking for meaning, there are lots of people at the time would
have called faddists. So people who may be drinking exotic fruit juices and spending too much time
reading strange books. Well, but these are the kind of people who belong to the Liberals, aren't
they?

So what are they doing joining the fashion?
Well, maybe there's an interesting crossover.
The fruit juice crossover, they would try to recruit at the Rotary Club at the British Legion.
I mean, they do get some people, they get young people. I'm used to see the, by 1934,
so two years into his existence, the BUF had set up branches in at least 11 public schools.
So Winchester, Moses Old School, Rishisunek School, had a BUF branch, Haileybury, Millhill,
Mulbrough, Stowe. I don't know about Dullitch, Tom. I know you're fascinated by Dullitch.
But it's also he's appealing to people in industrial
areas as well, isn't he? Yeah, and the North he makes a big effort, because of course,
that's partly what he's been doing as a Labour MP.
So talking of the North, you know that one of the venues that he fills up is Usher Hall in
Edinburgh, where we appeared. Really? So we were given the rest as politics stick in Episode 1
about being in the Albert Hall with a load of fascists, centrist fascists. And so, and we have
our own, you know, we have our own dirty little secrets as we do, appearing at fascist venues.
Yeah, so they got 2000 members in Leeds. They're very big with women and with aristocratic women
in particular. So just looking at the list, Vi counters down, Lady Claire Annersley, Lady Howard
of Effingham, Lady Pearson. They're even ex-suffragettes. So there's a quote here from an ex-
suffragette
called Mary Richardson. I was first attracted to the black shirts because I saw in them the
courage, the action, the loyalty, the gift of service and the ability to serve, which I had
known in the suffragette movement. And Dominic, are any press barons signing up to the black
shirts?
So from the beginning, the BUF does try quite hard to win over people in the establishment.
So they have, I think, the January Club, which is a kind of front organization,
and that will get in lots of writers, lots of people who end up becoming conservative MPs.
So the two conservative ministers in the post-war years, I could Alan Lennox Boyd and Duncan
Sands,
who was in charge of defence. So just a question. Yeah. From the point of view of
the parliamentary parties, are labour and conservatives equally hostile to it? Does it
appeal more to conservatives? Do people in the Labour Party feel sympathy for the economic
programme? Because basically, it's kind of patriotism of the right and the social policies
of the left, isn't it? At this stage, I think, if you were being relatively generous to the
British Union of Fascists, you would say, at this stage, going just by its manifesto,
yes, as you say, it is protectionist, it is nationalistic, it is Keynesian economics,
and it's kind of corporatist, but they're not in their official publications.
You know, they're not picking on minorities. They are talking about the old gang of politicians
and all that kind of thing, but they're not especially in their official stuff, anti-Semitic.
That said, even at the early stage, there are lots of anti-Semite in piling in. Yeah, piling in.
But you said about conservatives and labour, among the personnel, far more conservative than
labour.
So you look at the list of people, there are lots of MPs who go to these January Club dinners
and things. So these dinners are not branded with the BUF thing, but they're a kind of
halfway house, if you like. There are lots of people with titles, Lord Middleton,
Earl Jellico, the Markets of Tavistock, Lord Londonderry, and so on. T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence

of Arabia. Lawrence of Arabia is attracted by it. He actually writes to the secretary of the January Club, and he says, I'm really keen on your movement. I hope I wish you well. I'm just not ready to join it myself. You know, I think it's exactly the kind of thing that would have appealed to Lawrence. Romantic action, the young generation, all that stuff. Now you mentioned press magnates. At this point, the British Union of Fascists does get admiring press coverage from, for example, the Rothermere organization. So that is the Daily Mail or the Sunday despatch. So the most famous instance of this, which I'm going to bring it up because I'm sure you will bring it up, Tom, and it's one that you see on social media all the time, is in January, 1934, when Lord Rothermere writes this opinion piece called, Hurrah for the Black Shirts. And this is constantly being wheeled out. And he is backing the Black Shirts partly because, well, so Martin Pugh in his book, Hurrah for the Black Shirts, describes him as the most influential single propagandist for fascism between the wars. Now, I don't know whether you would agree with that
judgment, but just to reiterate that at this point, fascism does not mean what has connotations it has for us. So I know that this is always used as a stick with which to beat the Daily Mail today. But there is a sense in which Lord Rothermere can back the Black Shirts because he is a massive reactionary, clearly, but also because he's a highly commercial newspaper magnate. And he can see that there is a market here. So he's backing it not just because it's coming from his political convictions, but because he feels that he can make a profit from it. Would that be fair? I'm not sure that the profit motive is actually that important. I think, actually, so Lord Rothermere had lost, I think, two of his sons in the First World War. He undoubtedly is on the right of British politics. And I mean, this papers have always been on the right of British politics, always very pro-empire, patriotic, worried about Bolshevism, all of that sort of stuff. I think he is absolutely, I don't think he's an outlier necessarily. I think he is a very good example of a lot of people that would include Winston Churchill, let's say, and indeed lots of conservative MPs, indeed some people in the Labour Party as well, who are transfixed by the fear of communism and Bolshevism, who basically see it lurking as a specter. I mean, not unreasonably,
by the way, because an awful lot of people have died in the Soviet Union, who think it's anything is better, any shield, any sword against this terrible menace. I mean, this is what Churchill is saying again and again about Mussolini, of course, in the 1920s. Anything is better than that. And of course, as you say, they don't know what we now know. Right, so that sense that reactionaries, conservatives, people who are very, very anxious about the threat of Bolshevism, that they can use the fascists as a shield, the Italian ambassador can't grandi to London. He makes this point to Mosey. He notes that, and I'm quoting Martin Pugh here, that in Italy, reactionaries like Rothermere had intended to harness fascism to defeat socialism and democracy, thereby establishing themselves in power, but realized too late that they had opened the way to a real revolution in government, rather than to a consolidation of the right wing. Is the Italian ambassador's take on what is happening with Rothermere's support for the fascists? I think the question that people always ask or the emphasis that people place is probably wrong. So people say, gosh, look at this, isn't this shocking? Ha, ha, ha, kind of thing. Actually, the interesting thing that happens in Britain is that the people who you might expect to be sympathetic to that movement, withdraw their support quite quickly. Including Lord Rothermere. Yeah, exactly. Lord Rothermere withdrawing his support. So that doesn't happen

in Germany or in Italy. And there's one particular moment that explains why that happens, which is one of the great sort of landmark dates in the history of the British Fascist movement, which is on the 7th of June, 1934, the meeting and the violence at Olympia. So Olympia is in, where is it, Thomas? In Kensington, isn't it? Yes. Huge kind of arena, kind of exhibition space, I guess. They're always kind of ideal home exhibitions and things like that taking place in Olympia. And that evening, on the 7th of June, 2000 black shirts in total, in two kind of groups, march through the streets. The biggest group sets off from the King's Road in Chelsea, marches through the streets. A great public spectacle to Olympia. There's a huge crowd outside of counter demonstrators. By the way, the existence of the counter demonstrators does slightly make you think, okay, this isn't just, you know, okay, people don't know what we now know. But there are a lot of people at the time who think this is not on. Yeah, this is, there is something pernicious and poisonous about fascism. A lot of those counter demonstrators, of course, would be communists or trade unionists and things. But there is a sense that fascism is unusual, that there is some toxicity to it. So on trade unions, does most of you want to abolish trade unions like Mussolini stuff? He would make them guilds. Oh, medieval guilds. Yes, they love their medieval guilds, don't they? Yeah. So the fascists, anyway, there's a bit of argy bargy outside, they get inside the great Olympia space. There are thousands of people there, 12,000 people in the audience, including, and this is a fascinating thing, 150 MPs. So I'm guessing most conservative, no, not all conservative, most of them conservative, I think the vast majority conservative. And there are dozens and dozens and dozens of society people aristocrats, lady this, so Horace that, you know, the Earl of whatever, the Marquis of this, they're all there because they are mostly his friends, they're his class, they're his people. And they actually probably sympathize with a lot of this, you know, let's, you know, fight off, let's have a fresh start. Let's get rid of all this democratic flapper rubbish. Let's get rid of communism, all that. They're all flags. I mean, it's an amazing spectacle. It's a spectacle on a scale that has never been seen in Britain, in politics, with floodlights with, I mean, everybody comments on the loudspeakers, massive, overpowering loudspeakers, Moses voice echoing through the hall, you know,
sort of the theatricality that we would associate with Goebbels, Tom. So, of course, they've been in power for a year now. Yeah. But the stagecraft is Hitler, isn't it? The stagecraft, exactly, exactly. But what happens at this meeting is right from the start, he's being heckled. Now, the communists had a history of, they had a track record of heckling in this way.
In the debate in the House of Commons that follows this, Clement Attlee says, you know, I think the communists have just disrupted this deliberate, they do it to me all the time.
So this is standard, he blames, you know, communists for it. But every time there's a heckle, mostly stop speaking, the searchlights are trained on the heckler, and then a group of black shirts will identify the heckler and beat him up there and then. These are the Biff boys. Well, these are much worse than the Biff boys. The Biff boys were working for the new party. These people are, you know, William Joyce, the future Lord Haw-Haw, who we've talked about. So they're kind of knuckle dusters and... Knuckle dusters, you know, plastic truncheons. They will kick you, they will just kick you on the ground again and again.
So like the Nazis in Germany. Exactly. Now, some observers, it's really interesting, some of the observers, including some of the conservative MPs, are horrified by this.
And some conservative MPs actually write a letter to the Times. One conservative MP,

Geoffrey Lloyd, I saw things at Olympia that made my blood boil as an Englishman and as a Tory.
So there is a sense that this is, this has crossed a line. Martin Pugh in his book,
Hertha Blackshirt says, he wonders how many of the people making these claims are actually
Baldwin loyalists. And actually, they had always been fighting at British election meetings,
going right back to the 19th century and to the 18th century.
But what you don't do is shine spotlights on them.
Exactly. Exactly.
I mean, usually, you know, it's happening on the margins. People don't want to talk about it
because it's embarrassing. If you push down and massacrate spotlights so that everyone can see
the bully boys beating up the protesters, then you're making a statement about your
relationship to violence, aren't you? You're foregrounding it.
Yeah, could not agree with you more. I think that's absolutely right.
I think, oh, I was just thinking what a good point it was. I just thought it was a really good
point that, of course, it's different. If it's a liberal conservative election in the heyday of
Gladstone, Israeli, drink has been taken in Market Snodsbury. There's rowdyism on the fringes of
the meeting is Ned, whatever is having a punch up with Horace so and so, they're shouting about
tariffs at each other or whatever, church disestablishment. That's one thing. And no one
would say Gladstone has willed this. Yeah, this is part of Gladstone's credo. But Mosley, not only
to train the spotlight on it, but his whole credo of action and dynamism and strength and
strength and aggression and non-parliamentary rule. And I think there are different, some people
say Mosley might have lost control. Some people say he encourages the deliberate overreaction.
I think it's perfectly plausible that he encourages the deliberate overreaction because
Mosley's rhetoric is so aggressive. I'm sure he said, let's make an example of them. It will
inspire people to join our movement, all this kind of thing. But the furor I think is very damaging
for Mosley. And this is what completely loses him the support of Lord Rothermere and of much of
the
press. So Lord Rothermere withdraws all the support of his newspapers from the BUF. He says,
this has crossed a line. Now, some people say, well, he only cared about his advertisers.
I'm not sure that's quite right. I think Rothermere wrote to Mosley and he said,
I've noticed that there's more and more anti-Semitism in your movement and I cannot
support that. But also, I think the timing is really important. Olympia happened on the 6th
of June, 1934. On the 30th of June, it's the night of the Long Nives in Germany,
when Hitler massacres part of his own movement. That's the first, for a lot of people who have
been watching Hitler with interest and not necessarily with open hostility. They're very
shocked by the violence, the bloodshed of the Night of the Long Nives. And I think the coincidence
of those two things means that a lot of establishment kind of toru-ish people in Britain think,
whoa, this is crossed. We can't have anything like this in Britain. This is absolutely crossing
a line. And so actually, having attracted tens of thousands of members earlier by the end of 1934,
Mosley has lost the support of the press and he's lost loads of members. The membership is falling
and his crowds, he has a meeting in White City, his next big meeting is in White City,
and he gets only 3,000 people. They are outnumbered at least 20, maybe even
50 to one by crowds of counter demonstrators. So at that point, I would argue at that point,
by crossing that line into violence at Olympia, he has actually already torpedoed any attempt
to present his organization as a serious, respectable party of government.

But you see, I mean, so Martin Pugh quotes the numbers of the British Union fascists that it was 40 to 50,000 in 1934 and it's 5,000 by 1935. Yeah, but even those figures in 1934 aren't that big. No, but don't forget, most people, I mean, most political party membership in Britain is greatly inflated in the interwar years anyway. So most of the people who are Labour Party members are actually members because they're members of trade unions, not because they're suffused with excitement.
We're doing four episodes on British fascists, so I don't want to say they're unimportant.
It's a bit late now, Tom.
But I mean, just to emphasize that actually, I mean, it is still a very peripheral movement.
Peripheral but eye-catching.
Peripheral but eye-catching and in our third episode, we will look at a particularly eye-catching incident, an incident that still has reverberations in British politics right the way up to the present day, which is the Battle of Cable Street in the East End. Very, very mythologized episode and definitely keeps the fascists in the public eye. So we will be back with that next week unless, of course, you are a member of the Residents History Club, in which case you can hear it straight away. And also our fourth episode, which will be on the Midfords.
Yeah, Tom, I thought you were selling yourself short there because you basically are doing three episodes. I'm not going to say you're doing them under GRS. You're doing them with great enthusiasm and gusto and making some very astute points as we've already established. But as far as you're concerned, these three episodes are but a warm-up.
Oh, Derv.
For the episode that you want to do about the Midfords, which you've been talking about since the beginning of the podcast and which I'm sad to say has been met by some skepticism by your co-presenter. About the Midfords.
But I'm so excited that I'm going to be proved wrong. I can't wait. And if you remember the Residents History Club, get stuck in. Listen to me being proved wrong right now.
You will be proved wrong. You will definitely be proved wrong. The Midfords are a fascinating subject. And you can't possibly do a series on British fascists without mentioning Diana in Unity. I've heard you made that point about 500 times off air. So we will see you all next time. Bye-bye.
Bye-bye.