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The human and material cost of the Second World War alongside revelations of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities ensured that in the postwar world fascism was universally regarded as an evil obscenity, a doctrine of brutality, destruction, intolerance and genocide. More specifically, in Britain, anti-fascist attitudes became central to constructions of national identity, with animosity towards Nazi Germany and the heroic struggle against Hitler functioning as major sources of national loyalty and patriotic pride. Significantly, this fusion of anti-fascism with nationalism reinforced perceptions, dating from the inter-war period, that fascism was essentially an alien creed inimical to British culture and traditions. Whereas the British were ‘liberal’, ‘tolerant’ and ‘decent’, fascists were ‘foreign’ and ‘intolerant’, ‘fanatics’ who were intent on the physical extermination of Jewry. From this angle, fascism was viewed as an abhorrent foreign ideology that was incapable of ever taking root in British society. The failure of Mosley in the 1930s appeared to provide further confirmation that fascism was indeed antithetical to British cultural values. Therefore, it was widely assumed that given these conditions, fascist activity in postwar Britain could be safely ignored. In short, fascism was a thoroughly shameful ‘foreign import’, a futile effort destined for political failure.

Not everyone, however, subscribed to popular belief that the threat of fascism in Britain ceased to exist. One contemporary challenge to the pervasive view came from Frederic Mullally, an anti-fascist journalist. Although Mullally admitted that popular hostility towards fascism made a resurgence of a movement operating under a distinct fascist label improbable, he still warned against complacency. Mullally
contended that the residual appeal of fascism lay in various aspects of fascist doctrine, particularly anti-Semitism and anti-socialism. Moreover, because an 'important minority' within British society was receptive to these ideological concerns and thus sympathetic to fascism 'without knowing it', the danger was 'in the emergence of a new political force preaching an out-and-out fascist doctrine with a new label'. Mullally pointed to the existence of groups such as the British League of Ex-Servicemen as examples of fascist or 'crypto-fascist' activity, but his real concern was the possible re-emergence of the British Union of Fascists under a new name, attracting a middle-class clientele disillusioned by the electoral defeat of the Conservative Party and uniting around militant nationalism. The underlying message from Mullally and repeated by postwar anti-fascists ever since was that Britain did not possess intrinsic immunity to fascism. Therefore anti-fascists should be continually 'on guard' against the fascist menace and not bury their heads, to borrow Mullally's words, 'deep in the sands of complacency'.

Mullally was not alone in challenging the received view that a revival of fascism could not happen in Britain. The possibility of a postwar fascist recovery was recognised even earlier by the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX), which had taken immediate steps to counter the reappearance of open air fascist meetings in London in the autumn of 1945. Under the guidance of Lionel Rose, a team of between 12 and 20 AJEX speakers held regular meetings at fascist pitches in Hyde Park, Bethnal Green and Dalston, where they argued against both anti-Semitism and fascism, endeavouring to draw attention to the incipient activities of former members of the British Union of Fascists, who through ostensibly 'non-fascist' organisations such as Hamm's British League of Ex-Servicemen were preparing the ground for Mosley's return. Working under the auspices of the Board of Deputies, AJEX assumed the role that it had undertaken in the 1930s. One notable difference, however, was that AJEX now openly attacked fascism. This line was endorsed by the Board of Deputies, which had, in response to the Holocaust, irrevocably discarded its pre-war policy of isolating anti-Semitism from fascism.

The place of AJEX at the very beginnings of the history of postwar anti-fascism has already been recognised by Morris Beckman who additionally notes that the first physical confrontation between fascists and anti-fascists after the war took place in November 1945 following AJEX's occupation of the fascist pitch at Hereford Street in Bethnal Green. Besides heralding the return of fascist/anti-fascist