

Shining example

Helen Jacobus considers the progress of the battling anti-Fascist journal, Searchlight, as it celebrates its 20th birthday, and meets its indefatigable editor — building worker-turned-investigator, Gerry Gable



Leading from the front: Gerry Gable in action

More than 30 years ago, a number of young Jewish trade unionists, got together to form the "62 Group" — to fight the resurgent British neo-Nazi movement.

Followers of the latter, dubbed "synagogue arsonists," attacked 34 Jewish buildings in the course of a two-year period between 1962 and 1964. A child died in one of the attacks.

At that time, Gerry Gable was a young, Jewish, building worker and union organiser. He had links with the 62 Group, and had helped to set up an anti-Nazi intelligence organisation. This was called the Searchlight Association. Its newspaper, Searchlight, first appeared in 1964, edited by the Labour MPs Reg Fresson and, later, Joan Lester.

Gable, originally the newspaper's research editor, took over as editor in 1968 — and closed it down.

He preferred, instead, to concentrate on building up an elaborate intelligence network, based on volunteers infiltrating British neo-Nazi terrorist organisations, and helping to bring its leaders to trial.

In February, 1975, a time of violent and bloody street clashes between anti-Fascists and Fascists, Gerry Gable, together with union leader, the late Maurice Ludmer,

relaunched Searchlight as a hard-hitting magazine. It named the leaders of the National Front, and spelled out their convictions.

Searchlight sold out its February-March pilot issue and has continued as a monthly magazine, using virtually the same formula, ever since.

Two decades on, Searchlight's intelligence-gathering network is an international operation, tracking the far-right in America, Canada, Australia and on the Continent, with — it is claimed — "plants" at senior level in Combat 18, the British National Party, and so forth.

"We don't work for the police, we work with the police," explains Gable, who, among mildly anarchic anti-Fascist circles, has been sometimes accused of being overly "pro-police."

"If you find out a group is planning to lob hand grenades into a school hall, what are you going to do?" he asks, rhetorically, adding that his "first rule" is to "protect our sources."

The vice-president of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women, Henry Morris, is an admirer of Searchlight and its achievements: "There's no doubt about it," Morris affirms, "they do all the ferreting and the digging. They do

very valuable work and very good at it, they are, too."

This tribute is echoed by the Board of Deputies defence director, Mike Whine: "We recognise the valuable and leading role played by Searchlight in the anti-Nazi struggle, and we wish it well for the future."

But relations between Jewish communal leaders and Searchlight haven't always been so cordial.

In 1990, during a wave of Jewish grave desecrations, a behind-the-scenes rift came into the open when the chairman of the board's defence committee, Raymond Kalman, refused to discuss anti-Semitism with Gerry Gable at a debate organised by the Union of Jewish Students.

The board's line was that the desecrations were the work of hooligans and "copy-cats," while Searchlight insisted — based on information supplied by their "spooks" — that the attacks were highly organised.

Born in 1937, the son of Rebecca Gable and her husband Walter, a semi-professional boxer and street-fighter against the Fascists in the 1930s, young Gerry was raised on the borders of Hackney and Bethnal Green.

While Gerry Gable was a small child during the war, his father volunteered for the Air Force. Gerry vividly remembers his "good family

life" in two Yorkshire bomber command camps.

His paternal grandfather was killed in the First World War; his father's brother was killed in the Second. Gable himself is proudly pro-British. To reinforce the point, he talks of "one of the bees in my bonnet," — criticism of the bombing of Dresden.

"I remember fliers of 17 or 18 going out and not coming back. Like the Queen Mum, who has been loyal to those fliers, I think they should be remembered. People want to put Dresden on a par with Auschwitz. It makes me so angry."

He disregards occasional accusations from the left that he's politically incorrect. He knows his own values. During a violent clash at a meeting of the far-right League of St George at Kensington Town Hall in 1991 he prevented an anti-Fascist protestor dashing the League's Union Jack to the floor.

"I shouted out that the British flag is not the property of the National Front," he recalls. "It belongs to everybody in this country, and it should be treated with respect."

Gable has six children and seven grandchildren. His eldest son, now 39, spent several years in Israel on a moshav and now lives in Holland. Gable's wife, Sonia, is involved with her husband's work and was an infiltrator in the BNP for several years.

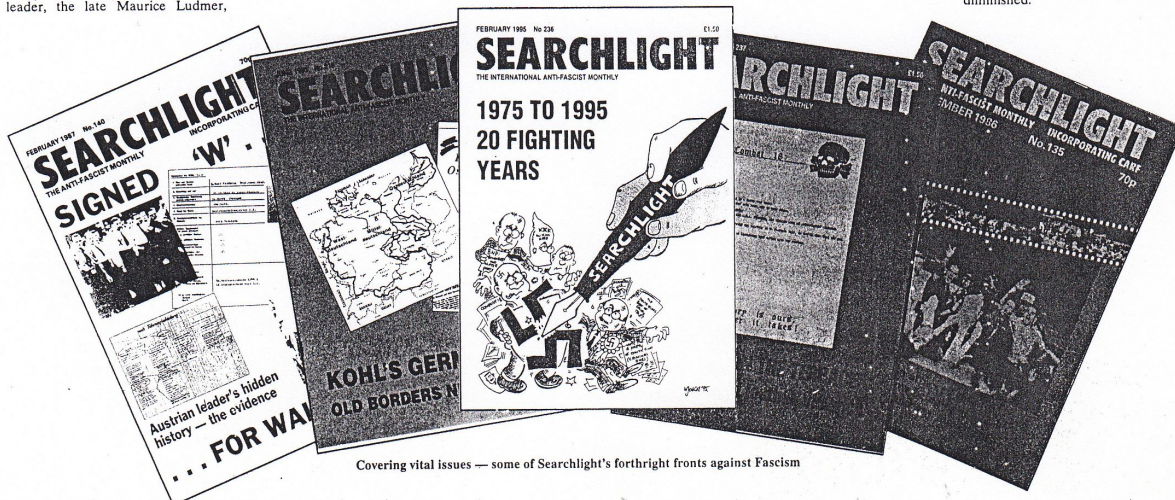
Shortly after the relaunch of Searchlight, Gable started work as an investigative TV researcher, leaving the hands-on editing of the magazine to Maurice Ludmer, but still continuing his intelligence work.

But when Ludmer died suddenly, at the age of 54, in 1981, Gable took over the sole editorship. He is still emotional as he recalls his friend's death: "It was like losing an older brother. He had a tremendous sense of humour, was extremely well-read, though, like me, he came from humble origins."

The extra workload told on Gable, too, and a heart attack forced him to give up his television job.

Gable has certainly not been an armchair editor. He has been arrested for his activities, and in 1964 he was fined for illegally entering the flat of revisionist historian David Irving.

And, last December, a letter-bomb was sent to his home — a clear, if painful, signal, in Gable's view, that the need for Searchlight has not diminished.



Covering vital issues — some of Searchlight's forthright fronts against Fascism