

Searchlight Magazine: A Well-Oiled Disinformation Machine

By Paul Cox

For those not in the know — and sadly that includes at least 90 per cent of those active within the periphery of radical politics in Britain, let alone the mass of the population — *Searchlight* present themselves as specialists in the comparatively small field of “racism and fascism”.

To all intents and purposes *Searchlight* the organisation¹ has a monopoly on the subject of fascism and is politically influential. As Larry O'Hara points out, “barely a story on fascists printed in the UK has not got their paw-prints on it, and the same (even more so) goes for TV documentaries on fascism”; furthermore, *Searchlight* provided: “official and exclusive research back-up for the two European Parliament reports into racism and fascism in Europe”, (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.1)².

Larry O'Hara has spent much of the last few years researching and writing about *Searchlight*, not because he has nothing better to do in his spare time from analysis of the machinations of the secret state, but also because *Searchlight* has itself put a great deal of effort into blackening the name of O'Hara, suggesting amongst other things that he is a “nazi fellow-traveller” (*Searchlight* No 216 June 1993, p.24), and “an informant for an agent of the SIS” (*Searchlight* No 218 August 1993, p.12)³

O'Hara's latest booklet, woefully entitled *Searchlight For Beginners*, is on the whole easy to read and comprehend for those of us with primary or secondary experience of the multifarious role of the *Searchlight* organisation. However, for those new to the subject it could be pretty bewildering, as it does require a degree of prior knowledge of the subject-matter and jargon...

the *Searchlight* organisation; Column 88; ‘hit-lists’; Combat 18 and so on.

The publication *Searchlight* originally surfaced in 1965 as an occasional anti-fascist broadsheet, and included amongst its contributors Reg Freeson and Joan Lester, two left-wing Labour MPs. It was not until 1972 that any significant impact was made by the *Searchlight* organisation, with the publication of the anonymous pamphlet *The Monday Club - A Danger To Democracy*, highlighting the activities of George Kennedy-Young, an ex-Deputy Head of MI6.

Although it was an “anonymous” publication, O'Hara is convinced of its authorship: - “No-one has ever admitted to writing this, but the content and style is highly redolent of the themes that were to be a staple of *Searchlight* stories throughout the 1970s and later...” (*Searchlight for Beginners*, p.1).

Two years later, *Searchlight* produced a pamphlet exposing the past activities of key members of the National Front, namely John Tyndall and Martin Webster. More surprising was the photograph of a uniformed John Courtney, described as leader of the undercover National Socialist Group, an organisation which *Searchlight* were later to claim were highly active within Column 88.

The pamphlet *A Well-Oiled Nazi Machine*, followed hot on the heels of the 76,429 votes received by the NF in the February 1974 General Election and the death of anti-fascist agitator Kevin Gately at Red Lion Square on June 15. Webster espoused NF innocence, insisting that there were “clear indications” that the organisers of the anti-NF

counter-demonstration were “intending to stage a physical confrontation with the NF” (Martin Webster: *Law Relating to Public Order* 1980, p.8) — a claim endorsed by O'Hara himself when he acknowledged that “despite the fact that the NF had not engaged in violence that day, thenceforth they were associated in the public mind with mayhem” (*Lobster* No 23, May 1992, p.16).

A Well-Oiled Nazi Machine was well received amongst anti-fascists, and *Searchlight* the publication was duly relaunched in February 1975 under the editorship of Maurice Ludmer, a one-time journalist for the Communist Party newspaper *Morning Star* and later a leading figure in the Anti Nazi League.

From “Nazi Underground” to State “Honey Trap”

Within months *Searchlight* had its first major story exposing Column 88, an alleged neo-Nazi terror group intent on having its members “in places of influence across the whole spectrum of the Right, from the Monday Club to the National Front” (*Searchlight* May 1975, p.5). In April 1976 C88 hit the national headlines with the exposure of joint military exercises with the Territorial Army; the source of the stories was one Dave Roberts, a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and *Searchlight* agent. The following month *Searchlight* boasted of “the many stories that have resulted from *Searchlight*'s research into the extreme right Column 88”, further adding that “C88 is a private army. It is illegal. There is no legitimate reason why it should be allowed to continue.” (*Searchlight* May 1976, p.3-4). O'Hara rightly states that this follows an “established pattern: stories are sold to the media, and then recycled/embroidered in the next month's magazine.” (*Searchlight for Beginners*, p.3). In 1991 *Searchlight* still referred to C88 as “the nazi underground paramilitary and

intelligence cell" (p.3). This same issue spoke of the role of the SAS and MI6 as "a training arm for guerilla warfare and sabotage" for the British Section of the GLADIO network, the secret NATO anti-Communist organisation, (*Searchlight* No 187 January 1991, p.3/ p.6). By 1995, however, C88 were a "honey trap operation set up by British intelligence", and furthermore were involved in GLADIO (*Searchlight* No. 238 April 1995, p.2), and "should not be counted as a genuine far-right or racist group" (*Community Handbook*, Sect 2.2-2). A serious about-turn, taken years after it could have any political significance; C88 no longer existed, and Sir George Kennedy-Young was long dead.

O'Hara has long opposed the *Searchlight* doctrine concerning both the Monday Club and Column 88. O'Hara argues that the Monday Club pamphlet represented an "exaggeration of the political clout of George Kennedy-Young", more so given that he later failed in his attempt to take over the Monday Club in September 1973. With regard to C88, he had already argued that as far as both the National Front and the National Party were concerned the private armies of both C88 and GB75 were seen as reactionary, supportive of the status quo, and "paving the way for communism", (*Lobster* No 23 June 1992, p.15). Furthermore, "without *Searchlight's* lurid 1975 coverage and subsequent follow up in April and May 1976, there would not have been any national C88 story." (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.3-4).

O'Hara's conjecture makes sense, and his alternative explanation seems hard to refute:-

"As we now know, the key murky secret state activity of the mid-1970s was MI5's efforts to use the situation in Northern Ireland to their own advantage... MI5 did not make the slightest appearance in either of the *Searchlight* hyped stories, which is a chilling omission.... *Searchlight* can thus, in the politi-

cally volatile 1970s, be seen as a 'distractor' diverting potentially prying eyes away from what is really going on." (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.4).

"Special Branch Pimps" and "Errand Boys for the State"

Where O'Hara is at his best is when he kills myths and myth-makers with their own words and with those of their closest comrades. Dave Roberts was first exposed as a *Searchlight* agent when he was convicted in March 1976 for attempted assault following a failed arson attack on Communist Party premises in Birmingham, which doubtless would have been blamed on C88, as were attacks on left-wing bookshops at that time.

From that time, if not before, Roberts was working for the political police. The following year *Unity* magazine spoke of tape-recordings and documents obtained by Roberts which had "gone to the authorities" (*Unity* No.1 1977, p.7). The following year Roberts himself was calling on the authorities to "arrest leaders of Column 88... ban all marches, meetings and literature", (*Forewarned* No.2 April 1978, p.11); and Terry Liddle, ex-husband of *Searchlight's* Daphne Liddle, wrote that Roberts was "reputed to trade information with Special Branch" (*Volya*, April 1986, p.6). Not exactly the actions of a revolutionary Stalinist, but then again...

Gerry Gable, who took over the realm of *Searchlight* editor following the death of Ludmer, is yet another ex-member of the Communist Party. He too first came to the fore in November 1963, during his bungled attempt to burgle the home of historian David Irving. His defence counsel, one Ivan Lawrence QC (later Sir Ivan Lawrence, Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee), commented at the time that Gable had "intended to hand over any documents or books they found to the Special Branch" (*Islington Gazette* 17/1/64).

In 1980 the left-wing journal *New Statesman* exposed Gable as a state asset using his own words from the notorious Gable memorandum, a letter from Gable to London Weekend Television in May 1977. In it Gable boasted of "my top level security service sources" and later confessed that "I have now given the names I have acquired to be checked out by British/French security services" (Gable to LWT 2/5/77).

By 1986 Gable was providing research back-up to the BBC Panorama programme on 'Maggie's Militant Tendency' which exposed alleged fascist leanings of some Conservative MPs. Gable was quick to boast of how the programme "drew heavily upon *Searchlight's* own revelations" (*Searchlight* No. 130 April 1986, p.2); but with two Conservative MPs taking out a libel action against the BBC and carrying out their own research into *Searchlight*, he panicked and concocted a story about how they planned to kidnap and murder him. Gable cleverly refrained from naming the MPs, but *Private Eye* magazine swallowed the story and went one step further in actually naming the MPs allegedly involved, and for their troubles the *Eye* were successfully sued the following year.⁴

A Conspiracy of "Hit-Lists" and "Death Squads"

The next *Searchlight* story to come under the O'Hara dissection is the lurid issue of hit-lists of political opponents. *Searchlight* has long claimed that it was the fascist 'extreme-right' that first published the names and addresses of anti-fascists to be targeted for attack, and supported this theory by exposing the actions of the Young National Front publication *Bulldog*, and *South London News*, both of which featured the details of hundreds of anti-fascists. In later years the implication was that Combat 18 continued this fascist technique of intimidation.

O'Hara has debunked this myth, not by laying the blame on anti-fascists, even though it was an anti-fascist publication that did indeed first publish a list of the names and addresses of fascists, but on the *Searchlight* organisation itself. According to O'Hara it was the publication *Forewarned Against Fascism* in November 1978 that first "began publishing 'hit-lists'", and that "these lists preceded those produced by fascists", and that the people behind *Forewarned* were none other than Dave Roberts and Daphne Liddle, (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.8). Only then, O'Hara suggests, did fascists respond — but that even then there lay yet another twist.

The nazi publication *League Review* began featuring informed details on anti-fascists in late 1978, written under the pen-name of Heimdall. From August 1979 *League Review* began featuring the names and addresses of Anti Nazi *League* committee members, a body onto which Dave Roberts himself had failed to get elected. O'Hara's supposition is that not only were these people opponents of Roberts, but that "a normally reliable source has suggested that Heimdall was in fact a codename for Roberts" (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.9).

Of more concern to O'Hara than the issue of 'hit-lists' themselves is the role played in all this by *Forewarned*, which whilst "run at arms-length from, but clearly connected to, *Searchlight* (and their ultimate protectors) proactively took the initiative in pouring petrol on the flames of political violence" (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.8).

Sonia Hochfelder first appeared on the political scene when she set up the diminutive "Communist Party of England: Marxist Leninist", however by late 1974 whilst studying she "jumped ship" and "threw her lot in with the fascists", as well as becoming the girlfriend of one Steve Brady, an Irish-born member of the National Party, a splinter from the

NF, (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.9). The significance of all this to O'Hara is Hochfelder's possible connection, via Brady, with the death squads of the Ulster Volunteer Force, and as such her alleged possible role in the murder of Michael Adamson who was shot by the UVF in March 1975.

O'Hara's evidence rests upon several key facts. Firstly the content of a letter allegedly from Brady to Hochfelder which not only mentions the assassination of Adamson, but also mentions his contact with members of the CPE:ML. Further details of these



self same CPE:ML members was then published by Dave McCalden, another Irish-born member of the National Party, in the July issue of *Britain First*, whilst at the same time the UVF publication *Combat* described the CPE:ML as the "most violent Communist organisation in the UK" (*Combat* May 1975). Who better than a past insider, Hochfelder, to have such knowledge of the tiny CPE:ML?

Hill Street Ruse

Searchlight are not only prone to using Stalinists in order to spread their disinformation on behalf of the State... When Ray Hill returned to England from South Africa and later

offered to work for *Searchlight* it was a godsend for Gable and his masters. Hill, a one-time member of Colin Jordan's National Socialist Movement in the 1960's (before emigrating to South Africa), had all the hallmarks of the perfect State asset. Politically, he had a tumid reputation, but few nazis would shun him; furthermore he is alleged to have fled South Africa under something of a cloud.

On the evening of July 6 1981, a *World in Action* TV expose implied that members of the tiny British Democratic Party, a breakaway group from the NF, were involved in gun-running operations. The source of the story was *Searchlight*, and their asset within the BDP was Hill. Ironically, the gun-runners were alleged to be supplying arms to American soldiers based in England, a most unlikely clientel for weapons sales!

Yet, as O'Hara points out, it was Hill himself who suggested to Anthony Reed-Herbert, the leader of the BDP, that the nazi movement operate a "pincer strategy", one offering a "respectable, clean political party" and the other "the capacity for underground activities" (Ray Hill, *The Other Face of Terror*, 1988, p.98). In reality one luger pistol was purchased and made available to the Americans, and another BDP member was convicted for unlawful possession of another firearm — as O'Hara quips, "Hardly Iran-Contra!" (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.14).

That same month, *Searchlight* fed a story to the *Daily Mirror* about an alleged neo-nazi plot to bomb the Notting Hill Carnival, which suggested that Special Branch officers had "discovered that the neo-Nazis plotted to set off a suitcase bomb" (*Daily Mirror* 21/7/81). *Searchlight* enhanced the story, claiming that the plot was "intended to leave hundreds dead" (*Searchlight* No. 74, August 1981, p.2).

It was of course all a fantasy

dreamed up by Gable and his State associates, but both the anti-fascist movement and the media wanted to - or needed to - believe it. Indeed, Richard Thurlow years later still referred to Hill having thwarted the "plot to explode a terrorist bomb" without providing any evidence of any such plans, (Richard Thurlow : *Fascism in Britain: A history 1918-1985* p.288, 1987).

O'Hara is not convinced of the existence of any such bomb plot at all. Viewing the activities of a synthesized europe-wide nazi movement, he argued "what is the point of going to great lengths to set up a network of European terror, from which Britain was specifically excluded because of the UK's role as a 'bolt-hole', in order to mess it all up with something like the Notting Hill bomb?" (*Lobster* No. 24 November 1992, p.18).

The Other Side of Deception

Critics of O'Hara tend to argue that both he and his research into the activities of *Searchlight* are being used by the fascist 'right'. because much of his work destroys many of the myths which are used to discredit fascism in Britain. However, O'Hara is quick to point out that the disinformation used by *Searchlight* against fascism is part of a greater State strategy to attack the political 'left'.

With the growth in political direct action through groups such as Class War, the State decided to attack the Anarchist movement, and *Searchlight* was an ever-willing accomplice. Class War were very active during the 1984 Miners Strike and staged a "Bash the Rich" march through London in 1985. In the aftermath of the Brixton riots in 1985 a *Searchlight*-inspired story suggested that Class War was "run by former leading figures in the National Front" (*Guardian* 30/9/85); in 1988 *Searchlight* implied that anarchist squatters in Hackney had been infiltrated by nazis.

The Poll Tax riot in 1990, and the

follow-up "Bailliff Day of Action" in July 1991, brought Class War to the fore again. True to form, first Tim Scargill (ex-fascist turned anarchist) was falsely accused of working with the British National Party and Combat 18; and again in October 1994 Class War was said to have been "infiltrated by elements of the extreme right" (*Evening Standard* 12/10/94).

Such disinformation serves the State well; not only does it create suspicion, but the gullible might well approach *Searchlight* with membership lists requesting that these "experts" peruse their lists for them, looking for known fascist infiltrators!

The Green movement also is frequently targeted by *Searchlight*. None more so than in the case of Tim Hepple, the State asset who simultaneously infiltrated the fascist 'right' and the green movement (see 'Activists or Agents' in *Third Way* issue 22, for a detailed account). However, just to briefly reiterate the career of Hepple: "football hooligan... organising race riots (*Dewsbury* 1989)... infiltrating Left/Green groups... offered Green Anarchist arms... gave them lists of fascist names and addresses" (*Searchlight for Beginners*, p.18-19). All sound like a familiar pattern?

"Let them hate, so long as they fear..."

Unlike Column 88, Combat 18 were a creation of the 'far-right'. Indeed C18 was created as a response to attacks of fascist/nazi meetings by anti-fascists, specifically the attack on a League of St George meeting at Kensington Library in 1991, at which Gable was arrested; and the failure of Chris Marchant/Nick Griffin of the International Third Position to prevent revisionist Fred Leuchter being removed and subsequently deported prior to addressing a meeting organised by David Irving.

O'Hara's analysis of the origin of

C18 is similar, and suggests that its founding corps came from "disaffected ex-BM members" (*Turning Up The Heat* 1994, p.67).

Searchlight repeated their 1970s strategy, the only difference was in the name, Combat 18 instead of Column 88. Firstly *Searchlight* called for "the investigation of nazi terror groups either to be put into the hands of a special police unit attached to the Police National Intelligence Bureau, or to be handed over to MI5 and MI6" (*Searchlight* No. 223, January 1994, p.2). The following year C18 was now a state operation, indeed *Searchlight* appeared to approve, asserting that "the reasons for MI5 wanting to establish another 'honey trap' on the far right are understandable and possibly justifiable" (*Searchlight* No. 238, April 1995, p.2).

O'Hara disagrees with the *Searchlight* hypothesis. Firstly he rightly states that there has been a "plethora of disinformation, emanating from both the Far Right and State connected sources" (*Turning Up The Heat* 1994, p.66). Further, he insists that "there is no evidence MI5 created C18" (*Searchlight for Beginners* p.25).

Superciliously, C18 had claimed "the police and *Searchlight* would find it impossible to infiltrate all the cells and monitor the activities of each, or estimate the numbers involved with the movement..." (*Redwatch* No.6, 1993, p.2). O'Hara suggests however that there are now to all intents and purposes two C18s; "C18 is at present run by a leadership who are largely independent of State control." Commenting on the *Searchlight* change concerning the origins of C18, he suggests that "by lying about the allegiance of the mark-one original leadership *Searchlight* are facilitating a takeover by real State operatives." To those who might condone this State intervention, O'Hara warns: "Such a takeover would not be undertaken for pacifist purposes" (*Searchlight for Be-*

ginnersp.25).

O'Hara even dares to suggest that "a recent defector from the team has suggested that in December 1993 Gable's main concern wasn't C18, but my exposure of his activities" (*Searchlight* for Beginners p.21).

The Men in the Shadows

It might help the cause of the 'innocents' amongst the *Searchlight* team if, as O'Hara suggests, they "stepped forward from the shadows. Why shouldn't the readers know full details concerning the younger and expanded team?" (*Searchlight* for Beginners p.29). This freedom of information is highly unlikely, as the team is tight-knit and most are indubitably implicit in their relationship with Gable and his controllers.

Given that this is the case, one can only agree in total with O'Hara's closing attack :

" The hydra that is the Searchlight organisation (the magazine being merely the public face of such) cannot be reformed or reasoned with, it must be destroyed and replaced, as soon as possible... the answer lies in your hands..."

Searchlight for Beginners

Notes :

1. *Searchlight* the organisation is split into 3 sections: *Searchlight* the magazine, the *Searchlight* Educational Trust, and *Searchlight* Information Services. The latter plays a key role in selling stories to the media.

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Prostitution & The Law

by Patrick Harrington

In 1954 the Wolfenden Committee was appointed to look into the Sex Trade. This led to the current law, the 1959 Street Offences Act. It states that being a prostitute is not illegal in itself, but it is illegal for a 'common prostitute' to loiter or solicit for business.

Any woman can be convicted of soliciting on the uncorroborated word of a single policeman. Soliciting is defined as "not only spoken words but also various movements of the face, body and limbs such as a smile, a wink, making a gesture and beckoning or wriggling the body in a way that indicates an invitation".

When a prostitute appears at the magistrates court, her previous record will be read out. If she has had two previous cautions for soliciting, even if there are no actual convictions on her sheet she will be referred to as a "common prostitute" throughout. This is the only crime in Great Britain for which a defendant's previous convictions are taken into account before conviction.

I am concerned at both the low standard of evidence needed to convict a woman of soliciting and the vague definition offered in the Act. I am also concerned by the way in which the trial is prejudiced by a defendant's previous convictions/cautions being considered in advance.

It is also an offence for a woman to work in a brothel (defined as any premises housing more than one prostitute).

If the present law is unjust what are the options for change? They broadly fall into three camps: tolerance zones, decriminalisation and legalisation.

Tolerance Zones are designated areas where prostitutes can work

set hours under conditions laid down by the local authority. The Dutch city of Utrecht has been operating such a system since 1984 for which girls must be over 18 and off drugs. Pimps are barred. Against such zones is that they create sex market ghettos.

Decriminalisation would abolish all criminal laws which single out prostitutes and involved parties. Vice would be governed instead by laws on public order and assault. Women would be taken off the streets so they would be safer. They would be able to report criminal offences committed against them and have legal redress. The public nuisance caused by street prostitution would be removed. It would also get rid of pimps.

Legalisation would make practices such as brothel-keeping legal. The State would collect tax. Holland instituted State brothels in 1992 but on 12 per cent of known prostitutes work in them.

The Third Way view is that brothels should be licensed for up to six prostitutes working on a co-operative basis in non-residential areas. Strict penalties would be applied for soliciting in the street (where confirmed by video evidence) or advertising outside approved publications. Persistent kerb crawlers would have their license endorsed and if necessary removed.

Our interest is to regulate something which will not go away. We want to minimise its impact on society as a whole and ensure that those who are not interested remain uninvolved and unaffected. We want to enable prostitutes to have redress in law if crimes are committed against them and maintain a communications between them and the State so that health advice and other services can be offered. Not a view your likely to find expressed in *The Sun*, but a view which has a logical foundation.