

Our Searchlight problem

The 'Gable memo' reproduced below originally appeared as the subject matter of a long and extremely interesting article, 'Destabilising the "decent people"' by Nick Anning, Duncan Campbell and Bruce Page in the *New Statesman* on February 15, 1980. This is still worth digging out, particularly for its detailed account of the context in which the memo was written. As the authors wrote, 'The memo.... clearly shows MI5's intense interest in manipulating events around the Agee/Hosenball case and the beginnings of the ABC prosecution.' Phil Kelly, against whom most of the smears were directed, was then heavily involved in both campaigns.

There are two obvious objections to reproducing this. The first is that I am, in effect, spreading the smears in the original 'memo'. However, the events described took place a long time ago and I am sure *Lobster* readers will treat the allegations in the 'memo' with the contempt they deserve. The second is that as this happened 15 years ago, and who cares now? This argument might have some relevance if the British Left (what's left of it) had taken the 'memo' on board in 1980 when its existence was first revealed by the *New Statesman*. But it didn't. The implications of the 'memo', and the role of *Searchlight* magazine remains a subject about which the British Left affects collective amnesia.

After the original *New Statesman* article, the memo was resurrected in the summer 1983 issue of the now defunct magazine *Anarchy*, and again in the March 1986 edition of *International Times*. In the latter Gable was still giving credence to MI5's smears about Phil Kelly. He is quoted describing Kelly as 'a fucking terrorist - of the worst sort'.

Lobster joins the fray

In late 1985, while I was researching what became *Lobster* 11, I discovered that Hull University had a complete set of *Searchlight* and went through them all. Looked at *en masse* that way *Searchlight* was remarkable. It had access to internal documents, phone calls, meetings (public and private) from an enormous variety of groups on the neo-fascist British Right. Who could achieve this kind of penetration? Only MI5 could, I thought. Then I re-read the story of the 'Gable memo' in the *New Statesman* - and that was the case closed as far as I was concerned. Thus it was that I wrote in *Lobster* 11 (p. 12, fn 66) that 'Searchlight is run, if not by, then certainly with the co-operation of, MI5. This was made plain by the Gerry Gable memo.'¹ About a month after the publication of *Lobster* 11 Gerry Gable rang me to point out a minor error in a footnote in it but said nothing about the allegations about *Searchlight* and the memo.² To my knowledge Gable has never publicly commented on the memo. However, in a letter written this year he wrote 'Let's take the LWT saga the fact that my fellow journalists many of them left wing stood by me during and after this storm in a tea cup may raise the question of what this was all about'. (Punctuation in the original.)

The reference in *Lobster* 11 to Gable and *Searchlight* rang bells with a number of people. The journalist John Michael (whom I have never met) rang me about six months later to let me know about a forthcoming press conference being called about 'the Gable problem'. A few days later - sorry for being vague; I didn't write down the precise chronology at the time - an extremely strange piece appeared in *Private Eye* (no 660, April 1987, p. 7) accusing Michael of involvement on the Contra side of the Nicaraguan war and of 'acting in a press capacity for the Somoza family'. This bizarre claim is flatly denied by John Michael, of course; no evidence has ever been offered to substantiate it; nor have I ever met or heard of anybody who claimed to either understand or believe it. The mooted press conference never took place.

About eight months after this odd episode, Steve Dorril and I went to a conference on the British right-wing at Southampton University. Gerry Gable was among the listed speakers. In the bar on the first night he came up to us and the first thing he said was, 'I had nothing to do with that piece in *Private Eye*.' I was

surprised, to say the least, for how could Gable know of my conversation with Michael except through a phone intercept at my end or his?³

Searchlight smears O'Hara

The Gable-*Searchlight* controversy resurfaced last year in the columns of the London left magazine *Labour Briefing* in the context of splits in the ranks of London anti-racists.⁴ In October 1991 Larry O'Hara joined in the debate and reminded *Labour Briefing* readers of the 1980 *New Statesman* story about the 'Gable memo'. In *Labour Briefing* of February this year *Searchlight* staffer Graeme Atkinson replied to this debate, writing of 'the hoary old "Gable memorandum"' and asserting that 'not a single accusation about *Searchlight*'s "intelligence connections" holds water.'⁵ In August this year *Searchlight* published a column by Ray Hill in which Larry O'Hara was attacked for a short piece he had written for *Tribune* (29 May, 1992) and described as 'a political errand boy for [ex National Front] Patrick Harrington'.⁶ At which point I thought: OK, enough is enough; Larry O'Hara is not a supporter of any species of the Right. Larry wrote a letter to *Searchlight* (which didn't get published) and complained to the Press Complaints Commission (which declined to take an interest).

Why was Larry O'Hara attacked? There are two possible reasons I can see. The first is commercial. *Searchlight* now has a virtual monopoly as consultants on the far Right to the British media. Independent experts on the Right such as O'Hara may simply be a threat to that monopoly. The second, and much more likely in my view, is ideological. *Searchlight* also seems to have a distinct 'line' on the British Right. It wants its readers to perceive that the British far Right are all essentially or potentially fascists or nazis, no matter how their beliefs may shift, or how far individuals distance themselves from German national socialism.⁷ Because O'Hara insists on taking the far Right's ideas seriously, rather than just dismissing them all as 'nazis' or 'fascists', he is a threat to the *Searchlight* 'line'. The piece in *Tribune* which aroused *Searchlight*'s ire is a good example. Rather than dismissing Patrick Harrington as a 'nazi' or a 'fascist' on the basis of his previous membership of the National Front, O'Hara noted his apparent distance from NF positions and tentatively classified the Harrington group as Poujadist.

Does any of this really matter? I think it does. There are obvious areas of mutual interest between the section of MI5 and Special Branch dealing with the British far Right and something like *Searchlight*. But as the memo shows, at any rate in 1977, for a former full-time employee of the CPGB, Gable was an astonishingly credulous partner to whomever it was in MI5 who fed him the baloney about Phil Kelly and the KGB. Somebody capable of recycling that much nonsensical hearsay - and remaining unrepentant about it - is not to be trusted.⁸ There aren't many areas on which all of us still out here 'on the Left' or still 'radicals' agree on, but one of them would be that, short of some exceptional life-threatening situation, it is not possible to co-operate with the British secret state.

My enemy's enemy

Finally, why did *Searchlight* attack Larry for a tiny little fragment in *Tribune*? Why not for the much bigger piece in *Lobster* 23? Indeed, why has *Lobster* never been given the *Searchlight* smear treatment? It may be that *Lobster* is simply too small to be worth *Searchlight*'s attention, but I suspect the real reason lies elsewhere. Throughout the 1986-88 period Colin Wallace and Peter Wright provided evidence of 'MI5 plots'. On closer examination, however, as Steve Dorril and I tried to elaborate in our book *Smear!*, the picture of the mid 1970s was more complex than this. People either linked to MI6 or former officers of MI6 were running their own operations during this period. This is the thesis that has always been promoted by *Searchlight*. From their famous issue 'The Men in the Shadows' (no. 18, November 1976) through to

their 'Quiet Coup' issue (no. 144, June 1987), *Searchlight* has consistently pointed the finger at the activities of former MI6 Vice Chief G.K. Young and 'the bridge' between the neo-fascists and the Tory Right constructed around him. On the basis that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', following *Searchlight* in focusing on G.K. Young, *Lobster* has been a 'friend' of *Searchlight*.⁹

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Notes

(1) *Searchlight's* links with the secret state is hardly a secret. A profile of Gable in the *Jewish Chronicle*, October 23, 1987, said of *Searchlight*, 'The magazine has a small staff, but its stories, gleaned from a wide range of contacts (including people in the secret services)....'

(2) *Lobster* 11, Footnote 46, p. 8 says 'There is an interesting letter in the collection leaked from ISC apparently from Ian Greig to someone urging her to prise Walker away from Young.' This should have said 'to Ian Greig..... urging him to prise Walker away from Young'.

(3) I actually replied to him: 'How do you know that I know what you're talking about?' He replied, 'Oh, I knew he'd ring round everybody.' I continue to believe that he'd been given the results of a phone intercept.

(4) *Labour Briefing*, July and September 1991.

(5) He also hinted once again at the alleged Michael-Somoza relationship. In 1986 Michael had been involved with the final re-launch (so far) of *International Times*, in the March 1986 issue of which the questions of Gable's relationship with the British state had been referred to again. Atkinson referred to *International Times* at that time 'operating out of an office near Charing Cross, the set-up had an agent of the Somoza family hanging around'.

(6) And the smear worked. Within a week I had received a letter warning me about Larry O'Hara from a correspondent who had seen the *Searchlight* piece. O'Hara had predicted to me that *Searchlight* would smear him.

(7) This 'All Xs are really Ys' is a routine move in political warfare. Some of the Right always claimed that the Left, whatever their apparent differences, were all communists; some Zionists claim that all anti-Zionists are anti-Jewish. And so on.

(8) A copy of one of his recent letters I have seen shows that Gable is still in the business of recycling smears.

(9) The most detailed account of Young's activities in this period is *Smear!* pp. 224-8 and 264-9.

The Gable memo

Introduction

Here is the complete text of the so-called 'Gable memo', from Gerry Gable, publisher of *Searchlight* magazine, to his then bosses at London Weekend Television on 2 May 1977. I would have preferred to reproduce the original but the photocopy I have is too poor. The spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and emphases are as in the original.

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Phil Kelly was a member of the Young Liberals who in the sixties joined what was known as 'the Red Guard'. Young Liberals like Peter Hain and Peter Hellyer went against the traditional Liberal line and started campaigning along lines more akin to the Radical left. They stood out against the Vietnam War/ Apartheid and for the Palestinians against the Israelis. At home they were for direct action on housing and other evils in our society.

In the first place, as I understand it, Kelly was an odd fish in the rather middle class Young Lib circles, he had a strictly working class background.

He was up to his neck in various campaigns in 1967. The Biafra aid set up was one of them. He was also seen frequently during that year at the offices of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. It was suggested that in either late '67 or early '68 he travelled to Cuba and was trained as was 'Carlos' during the same period. Certainly Cuba held a Tri-Continental conference at that time involving many third world and Latin American states where Cuba was active in spreading their own brand of revolution. It is suggested that parallel to the conference, an extensive course of training in Guerilla warfare and Espionage took place. If the latter is true, then certainly Cuba's own Secret Service would have been aided by the KGB on the espionage side of the courses. In the early part of 1969 Kelly was seen at the Soviet Trade Mission in London.

I think that around this time he worked on the Hornsey Journal or another paper in that area, then he moved to work in the new radical press - being a familiar face at Black Dwarf/Seven Days and later Time Out. Hellyer and some other Young Liberals got very involved with the Palestinians around this time and in the summer of 1969 Kelly went to Jordan, not, as he told people, to see the refugee camps, schools and medical aid groups, but to a proper Fatah training camp. Members of the Baader Meinhof group also attended these camps and learnt their bombing and killing skills in them. Kelly was taught firearms/explosives and went out on some treks to the Israeli border with Fatah patrols.

Around this time, after returning to London, Kelly acted as a cheer leader on several Arab demonstrations in London and during fighting in one of them he was seen to kick a policeman.

But although he seemed firmly in the left camp, a number of odd things about his attitude towards a person he knew to be

hostile to the left are rather strange, on several occasions he could have blown the cover of a man who had infiltrated the Palestinians and some left groups. This man ran into him time and time again, including once at a function organised by the Cuban embassy in London. Kelly was seen on Irish Rights marches the night the Ulster office was attacked, medical aid for Vietnam, Portuguese meetings and even a demo over Anguilla.

Wherever he worked on left journals he always seem to get into a position [section illegible, but probably 'had access to the'] names and address of subscribers. Reports from left watchers state that he has been to Cuba, America, East Germany, Jordan and Sofia in Bulgaria for a Peace Conference. In the early seventies he went to work in West Germany and was away for around two years, I understand that he worked as a sports reporter (he was there at the time of the Munich massacre). He also had a German girl friend whose name is either Gerde Jager, or Jaegar, the daughter of a rich lawyer. She is said to be close to SWAPO operations in Western Europe and tied up with something named 'Informist'?

Back in Britain Kelly worked at Time Out and was instrumental in introducing Mark Hosenball to stories that are part or even all of the reason for his deportation order. Around Time Out a group of Americans, Kelly, Duncan Campbell (the technology freak), plus Crispin Aubrey and John Berry (not just a former Army signals clerk, but a former member of British Military Intelligence) began to operate.

More than a year ago Kelly started to work for Interpress Services, a press agency of which he appears to be the sole employee in this country.

Even some of the left watchers here thought that this agency was set up at the time of a Third World Conference held in Colombo in Sri Lanka a couple of years ago and that in some way it is connected with the Yugoslav State Press Agency. However our checks reveal that it was set up in Italy in 1968 as a press co-operative and the directors are South Americans and Italians, one of the original people before Kelly at this end was John Rettie - a man I still have to check out but was in some KGB scandal in Moscow some years ago.

The last return made by the co-op shows an annual turn-over of a quarter of a million pounds sterling, although it preceeds Kelly's joining them (at least officially) salaries are shown as only two thousand per annum.

Hosenball, who to my knowledge was always keen to meet any new contacts, told me that he had refused to meet Kelly's contacts in Germany but would say no more. He was also prepared to tell me that the co-op was, as he understood it, set up by some Chilean Christian Democrats who in more recent times dropped out to be replaced by the Iraqis, although no signs of this appear on the company house records. Hosenball is frightened to tell me more about Kelly and it is almost certain that Kelly could

blackmail Hosenball to keep silent. Since the Agee/Hosenball expulsion notices were issued, Kelly is often being seen more and more running round organising things. When Hosenball made it clear that he did not wish to be used as political cannon fodder, Kelly wrote an attack on him that appeared in the 'Leveller', a radical magazine.

This is not all that Kelly has done for the 'Leveller', he has also produced material on West Germany for them about the trials of the Terrorist groups.

The arrest of Campbell/Berry and Aubrey has caused a civil rights row, but according to my top level security service sources, they inform me in the strictest confidence that for about four years Campbell, Berry and Kelly and others have been systematically gathering top level security material. Campbell, who claims to have only an interest in technological matters in as far as the state is involved, had done four years detailed research into the whole structure of the other side of not only our Intelligence services but those of other NATO countries. He has also gone to people who work on top security contracts and started off by asking them about, open commercial work their companies do and then gradually asked them for information on top secret work, including that on under-water detection hardware, which he clearly knows is beyond the pale.

Politically it appears that the group have no one political guiding light or line, but Kelly is suspected of being the KGB man who reaps the goodies gathered by people who are possibly as disapproving of the KGB as they are of the CIA. [Two words

and taken to Paris. However, my own investigation showed that the files were not in Paris at all had never been taken out of Portugal, so why lie? His contact in Paris is Frederick Laurent, a young man who works for the left wing paper 'Liberation' and who lives in very grand style in a huge Paris apartment.

When Hosenball and Kelly had hold of the Crozier material they were very keen not to check out right wing connections but to trace phone numbers they felt belonged to Secret Service establishments etc. Hosenball also went to Spain, I think to track down one of the people mentioned in the Robert Moss letters, but despite all this research most of what they got was not appearing in print anyway. Kelly was not happy about Searchlight using the documents and I think Hosenball, who had done work for Searchlight on various occasions, felt embarrassed by his attitude.

Kelly's current girl friend is Dorothy Jones who works for the People's Press Service or News Service, a sort of Agitprop outfit. Kelly moved into a house in Hemmingford Road, Islington, some time last winter. He shares it with Richard Fletcher who is on the London Co-op Education Committee, (strong links with East Germany) this is at 104 Hemmingford Road, N7.

I went to the house one dark winter night just after they had moved in. I was with Mark Hosenball and the reason for our visit was to get some more photocopies of the Moss letters.

When we arrived, a man who I thought must Fletcher came to the door. The building is a shop, basement and upper part, it was in a bad state of disrepair and the man was plastering or something like that. He said to Mark 'there is a caucus meeting,

London Weekend Television

From Gerry Cable
Date 2nd Dec, 1977
About Agencies
To Julian/Mike Braham/Barry Cox (Please keep these reports secure)

Phil Kelly was a member of the Young Liberals who in the sixties joined what was known as "the Red Guard". Young Liberals like Peter Hain and Peter Hellyer went against the traditional Liberal line and started campaigning along lines more akin to the Radical Left. They stood out against the Vietnam War/Apartheid and for the Palestinians against the Israelis. At home they were for direct action on housing and other evils in our society.

illegible but probably 'Other teams'] like this have been operating in France and Sweden. (Agee has been in contact with the Swedish set up.) The security services feel that once the real nature of this case begins to emerge they expect people like Jonathan Aitken will fade away fast. The security service accepts that a number of decent people have been signed up to support these people on civil rights grounds and they also unofficially accept all the short-comings of the act that they have been held under, but they say they are sure this has gone well beyond the bounds of Press Investigation.

Hosenball, although supposedly having his differences with Kelly, was party to a strange chat between Kelly and Steve Weisman at Granada's Christmas party. They were going through a list of contacts and what Hosenball's reaction would be if he were asked about them. I could not catch the names but when one name came up all three of them seemed very keen to keep it out of the hearing.

Hosenball got extremely angry with Malcolm Southam of World In Action when asked about a man named Karl Von Metre, thought to be an American living in Paris, and would not talk about him. Hosenball's Paris trips are a mystery.

He told me two years ago that the reasons for his Paris visits were to go through files taken from a Portuguese office of an extreme right wing group that used a press agency as a cover. At the time of the army take over in Portugal they had been seized

Kelly was on a fish in the

Phil's up top'. Mark told me to hang on and ran upstairs to the top floor. Being a nosy bugger I followed and in the top floor front room were about seven or eight men, no women, all seated on cushions on the floor with no centre light.

They were a mixed age group. I didn't recognise any of them and they did not seem to know me. Kelly looked at me staring in over Hosenball's shoulder and leapt up and pushed us out of the room. He said to Mark in a low voice 'Why did you bring him here?' and Mark waffled on about not being able to contact him in advance and I needed the letters that very night as Searchlight was going to press on the next day. Kelly took us to the basement and produced the papers and then ushered us out as quickly as possible.

I have now given the names I have acquired to be checked out by British/French security services, especially the French and German connections and the South American stuff is being checked by Geoffrey Stewart-Smith's institute. He has strong CIA links. I may try somebody in the Israeli Foreign Office that I know for some checks on Kelly. It is now a time of waiting for feed-back and also further checks here.

I have attached a number of documents including a transcript of Kelly's interview with World In Action. It goes without saying that I would like this kept strictly secret.