



# COLOUR SECTION

**A** STORY in the anti-Fascist magazine, *Searchlight*, which came out earlier this month, is likely to be very embarrassing to right-wing Tory MP for Cannock and Burntwood, Gerald Howarth. *Searchlight* disclosed that it had uncovered a plot to murder its editor, Gerry Gable, through the use of personnel of a private security firm of which Mr Howarth is a director.

The story goes back to July 1984 when a reporter on the *Daily Mirror* received a call from a man called John Arthur Needham. He and three others had formed a company called Majorclose Ltd to engage in private security work trading under the name of Selective Security Services.

Needham subsequently met the *Mirror* journalist and claimed that he had left the partnership because there was an operation planned to abduct Gable, question him about his investigations into the right-wing of the Tory Party and then "disappear him". Needham claimed that the principal in Majorclose, R. Gulliver-Buckingham, was contracted for this work by a man called Richard Unwin, of International Security Services of Grosvenor Street. Several visits were made by these investigators to the *Searchlight* offices, checks were made on the *Searchlight* company at Companies House as well as checks on the negotiation of Gable's car. Gable pondered the revelations outlined to him by *Mirror* journalists and then contacted Special Branch. Officers there were concerned enough to place bodyguards on Gable and his family. From documents delivered to the *Mirror* and Gable it was clear that the instructions for the investigation had come from Richard Unwin International Ltd, a company full of retired Admirals and a Tory MP — Gerald Howarth.

Only last week the Attorney-General, bowing to pressure, agreed to conduct investigations into the affair and its implications, which will be far-reaching. The Prime Minister, however, has not been as forthcoming. She told the Labour MP Alf Dubs that she would not be referring this matter to the Security Commission and declined to answer questions put to her in the House.

Howarth has a longish history of involvement in politics of the far right. His mother was a one-time member of the National Front — a fact made clear some years ago through investigations conducted by Gerry Gable. He was named in the *Panorama* programme "Maggie's Militant Tendency" as being well into the Tory far right. Along with other MPs Howarth is suing the BBC for libel. Gable will be appearing as a witness for the BBC in this action.

Howarth has behaved in a somewhat peculiar manner. When approached by both the *Mirror* and *News of the World* he candidly admitted hiring private detectives to investigate Gable. He denied that he ever went further than that though.

When the *Eye* spoke to him, he refused to comment on this. Instead he said that he had never been in a plot to abduct and kill Gable.

When it was pointed out to him that no such allegation had been suggested or put he then threatened the *Eye* with Peter Carter-Fuck.

Gable was unusually reticent when the *Eye* approached him. He did confirm that he had had police protection and had been interviewed by Special Branch over this matter.

**T**HE consequences of being the Thatcher Government's most obedient tool are becoming evident at Westminster City Council where the gallant high Tory priestess, Lady Shirley Porter, is at the helm.

An unprecedented exodus of council officers, at all levels (costing the council £½ million in redundancy payments), has left yawning gaps resulting in a number of botch-ups — particularly in the housing department. The most serious results of these "value for money" policies can be found in the department's grants section where a series of internal audits and inquiries have revealed disturbing irregularities in the size and method of payments to private contractors.

The most striking example is the £560,000 improvement grant awarded to private developers Firstcross Ltd for Ashworth Mansions in Maida Vale where the subsequent audit report led to the resignation of grants surveyor, John Higgs, and has provoked a further internal inquiry into all grant schemes supervised by him. This inquiry is still going on and the results are being eagerly awaited by opposition councillors.

While the housing department dispenses lashings of loot in grants, it is at grassroots level where the squeeze is really biting. Last year the capital housing programme was reduced by £3.3 million (13.3 per cent of the total programme). Not only are essential repairs not being carried out in the remaining council stock but gross understaffing at area offices means the day-to-day running of council estates is virtually non-existent. One woman pensioner has been waiting since 9 January for a two-bar electric fire to be delivered. Her council flat has been unheated throughout the freezing weather.

Among the many points raised in a detailed document recently prepared by the Labour opposition, which calls for an inquiry into the decisions taken and practices adopted by Westminster over the past three years, Lady Porter was asked to explain her relationship with the owner of Racquets Ltd — one Zulfiqar Rahim. When she was chairman of the General Purposes Committee in 1981, Racquets Ltd was given a long lease on a public open space to operate a private tennis club.

Three years later the company went bust owing the council almost £24,000 in unpaid rent and rates.

In her reply Lady Porter insists there was no requirement for her to disclose her knowledge of managing director Rahim. The relationship was purely limited, she said, "to his being a tennis coach and my being one of his pupils."