

SEARCHLIGHT The Slide into Racism

FOR SOME time anti-racist and anti-fascist activists have been concerned about the political direction of *Searchlight* magazine. It played a divisive and destabilising role in *Anti-Fascist Action* in the mid-'80's, making allegations that the anarchist *Class War* group were in league with the National Front. It has become increasingly pro-Zionist and anti-Palestinian, totally ignoring the rise of the fascist-Right in Israel and the anti-Arab racism and pogroms in that country whilst consistently alleging that Arab regimes and the PLO are in league with various fascists. *Searchlight* has increasingly moved towards the political centre praising the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Peter Imbert (of Guildford 4 infamy) ignoring the Met's abysmal record on racism. This, and the links of its editor Gerry Gable with the intelligence services, particularly MI5, are documented in an article *Defending Zionism - Undermining Anti-Fascists* in *Palestine Solidarity* No. 42.

Searchlight has also played a pivotal part in setting up the *Jewish Awareness Group*, a body described (*Observer* 28.10.90) as a right-wing Zionist group. On Gable's own admission it contains members of the semi-fascist Herut group. The statement below, from the *Newham Monitoring Group*, describes what happened at its first meeting:

Black People Banned From Meeting

Members of *Newham Monitoring Project* and representatives of other black organisations including *Newham Asian Women's Project* and *London Alliance Against Racism and Fascism* were denied entry to a public meeting on rising anti-semitism in Britain held at *Ilford Federation Synagogue* yesterday. The meeting was organised by the *Jewish Awareness Group* and advertised in *Searchlight* magazine. *Newham Monitoring Project* has always supported anti-racist meetings and demonstrations and went along in solidarity with this latest initiative, hoping to build links with all genuine anti-racists.

To our surprise and horror, three of us (*Unmesh Desai*, *Barry Mussenden* and *Asad Rehman*) were banned from the meeting by security guards under orders from the organisers and *Gerry Gable* of *Searchlight*. The police were called to remove us from synagogue property. Various 'justifications' were given for the ban, ranging from individuals' stand on the Palestinian question to unknown 'personal reasons'.

The rest of us who were allowed into the meeting were thoroughly questioned and searched by security guards. *Jasbir Singh*, the Secretary of *NMP*, was forced to spreadeagle his body against the wall and undergo and intimate body search, including a search of his hair. Not a single white person was subjected to such humiliating treatment.

When we sat down at the back of the hall, we were surrounded by security guards who watched our every move. It was obvious that the organisers felt that members of the black community constituted a threat to the meeting.

When we realised that our friends were not going to be allowed in, we walked out, explaining to the meeting why we were leaving. *Gerry Gable's* response was "Just get out of here." Adding insult to injury, a member of the *Jewish Awareness Group* told the meeting that we were all members of a "Trotskyist Group."

Meanwhile, seven other local black people arrived and were also told that they were not welcome at the meeting.

As we were about to leave the area, a car drove by containing fascists from the *British National Party*, including *Richard Edmonds*, the *BNP's* deputy leader. In spite of the racist behaviour of the organisers, we stayed in the area to lend our support, in case of a fascist attack.

That black people who have played a leading role in fighting racism and fascism in Britain are excluded from a public meeting on anti-Semitism and treated like criminals is outrageous and must be condemned. That *Searchlight* played an integral part in this banning of black people is an indictment of the magazine itself and all it purports to stand for. (25.10.90.)



JEWISH ACTION

A new group, *Jewish Action*, was set up over the summer in order to combat the recent wave of anti-Semitic attacks.

Jewish Action believes that, just as in the past, anti-Semitism, racism and fascism will only be defeated by organising to challenge these evils wherever they show. Keeping quiet and hoping they will go away is no solution - it is irresponsible and dangerous.

Jewish Action is independent and welcomes all those committed to fighting racism and anti-Semitism whatever their political beliefs.

Jewish Action can be contacted at:

PO Box 23,
136-138 Kingsland High Street,
London E8 2NS