



## NOTES

### Press freedom on trial in Germany

*Duncan Campbell writes:* Press freedom to criticise the West German government is likely to be further eroded by a trial which opened last month in Hamburg. The editor of a fortnightly newspaper, *Arbeiterkampf*, is accused of 'insulting' or holding 'in malicious contempt' the Federal Republic by publishing two articles which suggested that the deaths of Red Army Faction members in Stammheim prison after the Martin Schleyer kidnapping may have been less than suicide.

Local prosecuting authorities have complained of four items in an account of the prison deaths, published late in 1977. These suggest that 'liquidation' of the prisoners had now become official policy, and that other prisoners could be in danger. *Arbeiterkampf* pointed out that nations such as Brazil and Argentina did employ death squads which operated with quasi-official blessing, and that the existence of such squads in Germany was an alternative to direct official actions: 'It is a matter for speculation whether the wave of "suicides" against political prisoners has been directly ordered by the Federal chancellery. . . .'

These comments are alleged to breach paragraph 90a of the West German Penal Code. It is not the first time that newspapers have been accused or convicted of the offence, but it represents a further restriction on what comment is considered by Federal authorities to be legal and permissible.

The prosecution is particularly ironical since it has been well established that a crisis planning group of the Federal chancellery evaluated contingency plans for killing the prisoners to prevent further demands for their release. The same propos-

ition was publicly debated during the period of the Schleyer kidnapping. A subsequent official inquest absolved the West German government of suspicion of having secretly executed their prisoners, despite the existence of the contingency plans.

State authorities in Hamburg have belittled the fact that the authorities had quite specifically contemplated the prisoner's murder: 'So what?' Nevertheless, *Arbeiterkampf's* former editor Kai Ehlers aims to use the trial effectively to reopen the Stammheim inquest, arguing that the official inquiry lacked necessary independence. In the wake of the recent Russell Tribunal investigation into West German civil liberties, and growing government sensitivity to allegations of human rights violations, the trial will be a further testing ground for German press freedom and democracy.

### Irish unions in new tax protest

*Brian Trench writes from Dublin:* More than 20,000 Dublin workers defied the national trade union leadership, the Labour Party and the foul weather to march through the capital on May Day, demanding radical tax reform. It was a clear sign that the protest movement of trade unionists wanting to shift the burden of taxation away from wage and salary earners (which brought an unprecedented 300,000 on to the streets in March) has not died away. Nor is the protest likely to be stilled by the new 'National Understanding for Economic and Social Development', a wide-ranging but vaguely worded document recently agreed in draft form by government, employers and trade union leaders. The executive of the country's largest union, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, decided after a

three-day debate, that it could not recommend the draft to its members. This alone almost ensures its rejection at a special conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions due to be held on 23 May.

The Understanding all but reproduces the form of the discredited National Wage Agreements, setting a norm of a two-phase 15 per cent increase over 15 months. The additional elements include a tax rebate at the end of the year in return for good behaviour and job-creation 'guarantees' if industrial action is not held to have disrupted the government's economic programme.

With local and European elections coming up next month, the Fianna Fail government can do without this hostility from trade unionists, particularly as it is matched with continuing opposition from farmers who object to new measures aimed at bringing more of them into the tax net.

The direct European elections are arousing much more interest in Ireland than in Britain. Like the local elections, they are being seen as a mid-term test for the government. But the Labour Party is in a weak position to capitalise on Fianna Fail's difficulties. In spite of claims at their recent annual conference that the tax-protesters were their natural constituency, the Labour Party has been opposed to the stoppages and demonstrations and is isolated from the most active trade unionists. Two of Labour's European candidates in Dublin appear to have good chances of getting elected. One of them, the party's deputy leader, Michael O'Leary, is staging regular pickets on the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, demanding that the Minister, Padraig Faulkner, open talks with the Post Office Workers' Union, to end the three-month national postal strike. Mr O'Leary wants the public to join him there every Monday; he hasn't invited any of the 13,000 strikers.