

NOTES

accumulate just under £30 million this way which, with the profits of the non-train business and various other items, gives BR reserves of £80 million. BR have not hung on to their surplus cash but have instead used it to reduce their borrowings: the cash limit rules do not allow a nationalised industry to draw on reserves to keep within the limit. If they did, BR almost certainly would have used this opportunity to cover this year's increased spending.

Spending will be higher because of the costs of the rail strike, bigger than expected wage settlements and cuts in government grants: in real terms the state aid to BR this year is the same as in 1976/77 and below that of 1974/75 and 1975/76. Spending in 1979 will easily break the £490 million PSO and be nudging the cash limit of £541 million. It already looks as though the government is going to relent on a £16 million cut slipped in between agreeing the PSO for 1979 and the cash limit for financial 1979/80.

Journalist arrested

Duncan Campbell writes: Charges under the Prevention of Terrorism Act have once again been brought to bear on a journalist in circumstances unrelated to terrorist offences. A reporter for the London magazine *Time Out* (and a contributor to the *NEW STATESMAN*), Ron McKay, has been charged with 'failing to complete a landing card' in the required manner. McKay had flown to Glasgow airport from Belfast, and was required, under Pre-

vention of Terrorism regulations, to supply details of where he had stayed in Northern Ireland. Although he described his address with sufficient accuracy for it to be later identified, he was unable to supply an exact street address, and was therefore charged.

The triviality of the charge suggests that the police and Special Branch officers were taking advantage of a technicality for other reasons. McKay had just completed a series of interviews with Provisional IRA leaders which *Time Out* is publishing this week. His report, which he carried with him, included an explanation of how the Provisionals had mistakenly claimed responsibility for the Neave murder. He had been interviewing Provisional sources at the time of the explosion, and was told that although orders had not been given, the Provisional IRA leadership heard the news and assumed, mistakenly, that one of their units had acted ahead of time. Both Neave and 'another rightwinger', he was told, were on a target list. The sources also confirmed that the Provisionals were responsible for the murder of ambassador Sir Richard Sykes, and for the attempted assassination of the ambassador to NATO, Sir John Killick (a neighbour was killed instead).

As a result of his interviewing, McKay, a former BBC broadcaster, seems to have been under surveillance as he left Ireland. He has also now been threatened with a possible Official Secrets Act prosecution over the text of his intended follow-up

article for publication next week. The article, which is being examined in London, concerns the Army's Ulster databank, which holds dossiers on more than one third of the Ulster population. It was largely based on openly available information.

Pollster's lament

Robert Worcester writes: Opinion polls get it wrong? Or is sloppy press reporting to blame? Look at the most recent example. Marplan conducted a poll last week, 29/30 March, in 100 marginal seats. *Weekend World* reported that the results of that poll pointed to a 15 per cent Tory lead at that time. So what do the press make of that? Most newspapers followed the *Sun* extravagantly claiming: 'The Tories will win the general election with a 110-seat majority, according to a new opinion poll'. Only the *Express* and the *Mail* were reasonably precise, hedging their bets. The *Morning Star* ignored the poll completely.

Declaration of interest: Robert Worcester runs pollsters MORI.

Sorry about this

The editor writes: This week, with regret, we increase the price of the *New Statesman* by 5p to 35p. Every journalist loathes a price increase, but their are limits to what we can do in our own tiny anti-inflation campaign. We shall keep on trying to expand the range and depth of the *Statesman's* coverage, in order to make it worth the price.