

SCOTTISH TRADE UNIONISTS GOT FIRST HAND INFORMATION ABOUT BERUFSVERBOT IN FEBRUARY WHEN THE STUTTGART TEACHER LOTHAR LETSCHE WAS INVITED TO THIS COUNTRY BY THE SCOTTISH CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE AGAINST THE BERUFSVERBOT [SCCATB]:

Starting off in top gear, Herr Letsche addressed the Scottish Executive of the NUM, who were unanimous in their opposition to the political discrimination against public employees which operates in West Germany. The 'Scottish' part of Lothar Letsche's visit to Britain included excursions to Belfast and Newcastle. In both these places he was well received. We find all the time that once people understand the McCarthyism which is now rife in our fellow-EEC member they are wholeheartedly opposed to it.

He described his own case in these words:

'I come from Stuttgart in the Federal Republic of Germany. I went to University there to study English, History and Politics until 1975. I was active in student politics and held several positions in the Students Union. I have also been an active member of the Trade Union movement since 1968. In 1970, I spent two years in Britain, working as a language assistant in Comprehensive schools in Glamorgan and Oxfordshire. I received excellent testimonials from them. In 1977, I applied to be a trainee teacher but was refused on political grounds. It was alleged that in 1972, I stood for student elections supported by a marxist student group; that in 1969 I had signed and distributed leaflets published by socialist youth organisations; that in 1972/74 I attended meetings of the local Communist Party and that I was a member of the Communist Party. This last allegation has never been substantiated, yet in my court hearing, the court ruled that not only was I 'unfit' to teach in the public sector, but that this ban should extend to private schools. Thus, if I want to teach, I must emigrate.'...

Not surprisingly, organisations such as the Glasgow local association of the EIS and Edinburgh Trades Council, both of which Herr Letsche addressed, were very disturbed to hear of these practices. What is a trade union negotiator, for example, to make of this statement, which was part of a court decision against Christian Planar:

'Herr Planar regards wage negotiations as conflicts between social classes. He does not consider wage negotiations simply as a matter of arithmetic, in which pay increases and pay reductions should be given equal consideration, but as a sort of struggle on behalf of the working class. There is no difference between his views and those of people who talk about employers dictating wages but never describe actions taken by trade unions as blackmail.'

The court is clearly biased against what we would regard as a legitimate trade union viewpoint. Nothing unusual about that, of course, - except that these decisions have

German visitor tells of persecution



Concentration camp: victims marching against the Berufsverbot. [Photo Klaus Rose].

cost many a committed teacher or conscientious technician their job.

Apart from the more common accusations, such as standing in council elections as a Communist candidate, here are a few of the more bizarre occurrences which applicants for public service jobs have been asked to explain:

Having lived in the same house as a 'radical'

Parking near a Communist Party office when a meeting was being held

Signing a petition against a hospital closure

Participation in an anti-nuclear group

Working in an organisation, such as a community association, where a 'radical' is known to be active

Criticising the practice of Berufsverbot

Being on the mailing list of a 'left'

publishing house

Demonstrating against the Vietnam war

Parking a car near the start of a demonstration

Conscientious objection to conscription

Protesting against an increase in bus fare

Protesting against the abortion laws

Incidentally, what can we make of the case of Herbert Bastian, a post office official in Marburg. He sits as a communist on the city council. His employer, the Federal Post Office, gives him time off work for his duties as a councillor. But they are also trying to sack him, because he is a Communist. However good the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany looks on paper, it is a worthless scrap of paper in the face of logic like that.