

# Death of a terrorist

THE weekend suicide in a Stuttgart jail of Ulrike Meinhof could prove unfortunate for the West German Government. They face an autumn election which will be that much harder to win if the suicide evokes a wave of sympathetic terrorist violence. It will be said that Herr Schmidt, the Federal Prime Minister, is soft on matters of law and order and that authority must be strengthened if it is to be respected. The chance that violence will ensue in the next few days or weeks is strong because of the symbolic status achieved by the Baader-Meinhof group, of which Mrs Meinhof was joint founder.

Their trial, which has already lasted nearly a year, showed how empty of purpose the group was, but it still represented part of West Germany's endeavour to come to grips with its past and its present — in particular with regard to authority and the role of the State in main-

taining it. This is a challenge for every society — the point at which respect for authority passes to acceptance of tyranny is a fine one and he is naive who does not know that laws and justice are sometimes opposed. For West Germans the challenge was particularly acute given post-war rearmament after the legend that their earlier arms had precipitated two world wars. Another parallel challenge grew out of their miraculous economic recovery from the last war. It nagged the conscience of the young and the sensitive. So it was that many Germans came to scorn what they were building. But Baader-Meinhof and others like them went further and espoused the cult of romantic violence which proved to be almost entirely destructive. In this respect, whatever its native flavour, the group is not unique. The contemporary world suffers many, though not all are so apparently aimless.