

To the Editor of Radical Statistics Newsletter

Dear Liz,

One of the topics that was mentioned at the inaugural meeting of R.S. which keeps coming up, but seems not to be being dealt with by any of the study groups, is that of statistical advice for community groups. It seems to me that there are many statisticians who would be willing to give advice on the extraction, interpretation and collection of data to people and groups unable to afford paid statistical help. Similar groups are starting in our fellow professions: for example, there are many legal advice centres now, and there is even a group giving free accountancy advice.

From the point of view of R.S. itself, the establishment of such a group would be good. It is always helpful in a movement such as ours to have a section rolling up its sleeves and getting on with a job the need for which is already recognised, while aims and policies are still being formulated. The latter prevents the former from forgetting the more long-term aspirations of the group, the former prevents the latter from becoming a talk-shop, and provides a base from which further action can arise. Particularly in the areas of demystifying statistics, public availability of data, exposing mis-use of statistics, and in emphasising our belief that Statistics does have a positive contribution to make to our society, could, I think, a group grappling with the problems of community and action groups contribute valuably.

I would like to hear from people interested in joining such a group. There are many things to discuss: how to contact organisations likely to want our help, how to allocate members to organisations, whether to seek the cheap use of computing facilities, and so on. Perhaps we could meet to discuss these and other ideas. As a start, here, for criticism, is a very rough draft of an advert that could be put in newsletters read by community groups offering ourselves:

"Statistics prove ...", "Our statisticians tell us ...", "The computer has predicted ..."; we are often faced with statements starting with phrases such as these, and have very little ability or power to verify the facts they present, nor even to assess their importance in relation to other aspects of the problem that maybe haven't been considered. Very few "men in the street" nor "groups at street-level" have the money to pay statisticians and run computers to collect and assess the data they feel to be important.

'We are a group of statisticians who would like to help such groups meet those who make such statements on their own ground; to help them to be as well informed as possible. There are two ways in which we can help: firstly, in getting and interpreting statistics that are in theory available to the public, but are in fact so inaccessible that no one can find them without an intimate knowledge of the volumes in which they appear. Secondly, we could give advice on carrying out surveys; getting a proper sample, designing questionnaires, and so on.

'If you feel your group could do with our sort of help please contact

home: Winchester (0962) 66971
office: London (01)-633 7532

Nic Wright

Dear Jeff,

9.

Presumably as 'guest editor' of Radstat News, you will allot a few pages to 'letters from our readers'. Could you please include this from me?

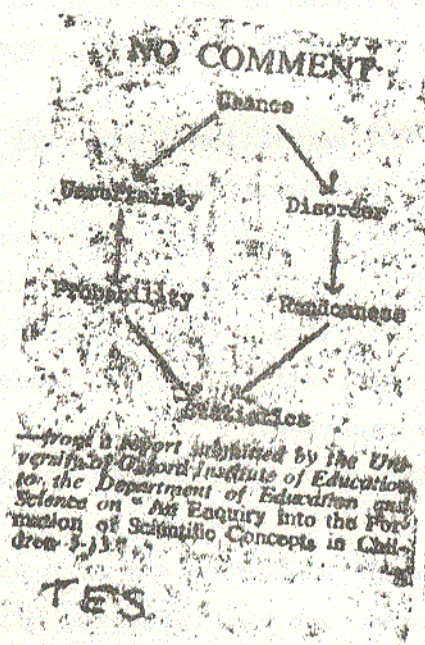
1. I should like to thank all those who participated in the July 3rd meeting of the SSRC Research Seminar Group in Quantitative Social Science. I must confess to being rather disappointed myself, particularly with the discussions. I think that future get-togethers of Radstats could well learn from the mistakes of this meeting. In particular, the following hints may be gleaned.
 - (a) More time should be allowed for discussion.
 - (b) Discussants should be 'briefed' to set the discussion going in the desired direction.
 - (c) Some sessions at least should take place in small groups.
 - (d) Possibly a completely different format should be adopted.

Of course other people may offer other hints, and they should be encouraged to put them forward.

2. The possibility was mentioned of publishing the proceedings of the July 3rd meeting in some shape or form. The discussion was recorded with this end in view. However, I now feel it would be better if people could send me written critiques of the papers presented there, as well as anything else they may care to contribute on the theme of Radical Statistics, and I will see if anything can be done with them. (Initial correspondence with John Wiley suggests that they may be interested in such a publication.)
3. In the Radical Statistics meeting on the evening of the 3rd, people suggested a firebrigade, flying squad or whatever of statisticians who could offer their services to left-wing groups. I will contact Counter-information about this. Will anyone who wishes to be included in this group please contact me, and also let me have ideas about how we should advertise this group.
4. A group of us are planning to look into the statistics of wages and prices. (A case for the flying squad?) Please contact me if interested.

John Bibby

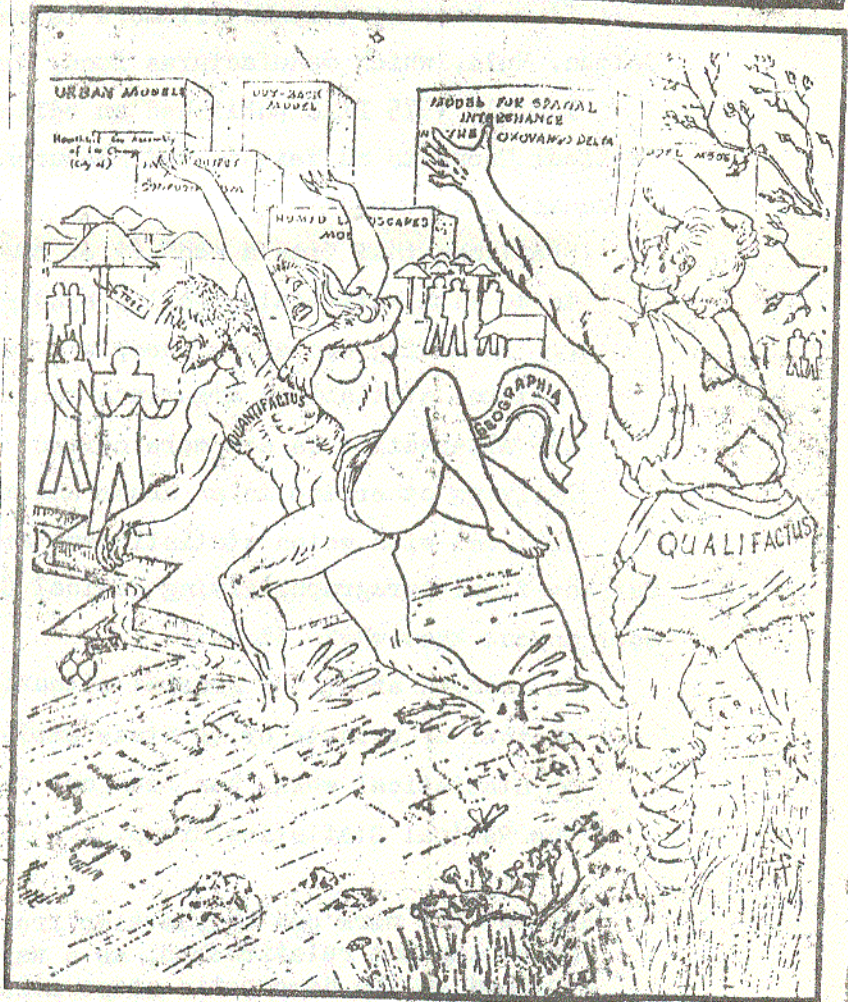
CITABLE SIGHTS



Former Finance Officer P B told governors that computation of student/staff ratios by subject was very difficult but that the poly now has a formula which will be used to analyse subject areas.

In looking at figures prepared by Mr B , governors speculated on how they could be "improved," only to run afoul of statistics lecturer/staff governor K E

"No value judgements, please. Figures don't improve or not. They only get larger or smaller."



The Rape of Geography. A circa 1960s view of the seduction of traditional geography by quantification. While the language of mathematics is now recognized as essential to social as well as physical science, the revised attitudes of "new geography" go a great deal further than mere quantification. (Drawing from "Geography, a Modern Synthesis" by P. Haggett, Harper and Row, 1972, after L. Curry, "Canadian Geographer", Vol 11, 1967.)