

BIAS AND "BIAS"

"BIAS" is the Bulletin in Applied Statistics, published twice yearly by Mr G K Kanji of the Statistical Laboratory, Department of Mathematics and Computing Science, Sheffield Polytechnic (Pond St, Sheffield S1 1WB). In the January 1975 issue an article was published by W A Pridmore - "Weights and Measures - A Story of European Statistics". This article argues, in effect, that the EEC rules on weights and measures, requiring only that labels show the average content of a type of packet, make more sense statistically than the present UK regulations, based on guaranteed minimum contents. Mr Pridmore, who is also in a Royal Statistical Society study group supposedly making objective professional recommendations on the subject, urges us (cuts in quote to save space):

"So when ... the comments over a pint in the pub begin, think hard as a statistician . . . You may well come to the conclusion that the Continental proposals have some merit in them. . . . If so, would you please say what you know? Please say it clearly, and please say it often."

It so happens that Mr Pridmore is employed by the firm Reckitt and Colman, Hull, which manufactures food, drink, pharmaceutical products etc.

In July 1975 BIAS published an edited version of an article "Some Critical Thoughts on Weights and Measures" by someone using the name Greenman, who argued:

"Feelings that "its a con" (i.e. the EEC regulations) may have nothing to do with anti-statistical prejudice, but express justified misgivings. . . . In making decisions, people's values and aims are the determining factors; statistical arguments can only clarify (or confuse) the issues. One alternative is not more correct statistically than another. Implying otherwise is an abuse and mystification which increases the distrust with which statisticians are regarded."

But the final paragraph, giving Radical Statistics a plug, was omitted - does anyone know why? It said:

"A concern about the general situation of statisticians as employees whether of private or of State employers, and the influence this has on statistical work, has been one of the reasons for the formation of the Radical Statistics Group. . . . It is my personal view that

statistical work can only develop freely and cater to human needs when the employment relationship, as a way of conducting social affairs, is replaced by the democratic cooperation of freely associated producers."

S. Greenman

(It was hoped to publish one or two responses from readers to John Bibby's "How Statistics can confuse the Issue - Some Preliminary Thoughts" from the last mailing, but we are short of space, and esp. time. So hopefully, the next issue will include these.)