

John Bibby and Jeff Evans have written to explain the cartoon on the cover of the last issue. This they do by way of reference to an article in RSS News and Notes (Nov 1976) which contains extracts from a speech by the Duke of Edinburgh in which he (apparently) condemns the inhumanity of statisticians.

The Duke said: "One of the most important consequences of industrialism is quantification. Every factor considered to be important in the daily lives of people has to be measured. Industry, which in its turn gave rise to technology and applied science, depends upon calculations of all sorts. Whether it is the price of materials, the cost effectiveness of research and development, the productivity of workers, profit margins, returns on investment or market research and hundreds of other factors, all of them are measured by numbers and best handled by computers. None of them allows for human idiosyncrasy or ambition. Improvements in the collection of facts and statistics may help to diagnose faults and failures but that is a long way from finding an appropriate cure for the human problems in a modern industrial society.

"And quantification has created a fetish for statistics which has spilled over into fields which used to depend upon judgement and a sensitivity to the problems, frustrations, ambitions and successes of people. Counting heads, classifying groups, working out averages and percentages, drawing conclusions, and predicting trends from computerised intelligence now tends to become the substitute for humane government and considerate management alike.

"Dictatorship by statistics is probably the ultimate bureaucratic paradise, but government is not about figures, it is about human beings. Management is not about statistics, it is about actual people.

"Quantification has also tended to reinforce generalisation. Judging by the attention they receive, one might believe that concepts like the national economy, industry, labour, commerce, science and technology all have an existence of their own, but this is simply because certain aspects of them can be reduced to statistics. All these things are figments, they have no real identity. They are convenient terms, nothing more than collective nouns, and they can never represent the individuality of the people involved in them.

This deparsonalisation and secularisation

is one of the most unfortunate features of industrialism. These, together with generalisation and computerisation could well destroy what is left of the individual personality.

"We must get it firmly fixed in our minds that all the trappings of our social, religious, political and industrial systems exist for the sole purpose of allowing life to be as tolerable and as civilised as possible for the individual and the family."

The reviewer notes that, while these "allegations" may be false, they are at least widely held and RSS should do something to change this characterization!

Radical Stats clearly leads the way, but I feel that we are not doing all we could. I may be out of touch (sitting in my Birmingham concrete tower) but the impression persists that our 'noble cause' (helping the 'underprivileged and innumerate') has been submerged under a flood of academic debate, most odiously, centred around a self analysis. The last issue of RS took a turn in another somewhat more profitable direction, the development of academic interchange of important social and methodological principles, but, none the less, we appear to be avoiding our servicing function. This was clearly brought home to me by a member of the editorial board of CSE, who said his organisation was completely unaware of RS. We could, he felt, provide a demystifying function they had long struggled with.

RADICAL STATISTICS AGM

SATURDAY 19 MARCH 1977 - INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY UNIT, IMPERIAL COLLEGE, 52-53 PRINCE'S GATE, SW7 (Tube to South Kensington then down main station tunnel)

Programme : 10.45 Business Meeting (Bank account, Treasurer's report, Publications policy, Pamphlet publication, Member's addresses, Sub-group reports).
14.30 Discussion of 'Whose Priorities?'
15.30 Discussion of 'Statistics and Government decision making'

PARTY ON FRIDAY NIGHT (18 March) AT IAN PLEWIS', 23 LINZEE ROAD, HORNSEY, LONDON N8 (Busses W2, W3)
Starts 8 p m - bring a bottle, please.