

BOOKS SECTION

(This section is introduced in the hope that you will send in short reviews of books which you think would interest other readers.)

1. Computer Lib, by Theodor H. Nelson. ISBN 0-89347-002-3, obtainable from 702 South Michigan, South Bend, IN 46618, USA. Price \$7. Review by John Bibby.

This large format 128-page book is a rather zany non-professional's introduction to the subject. It includes a layman's guide to language (including BASIC and APL), data structures, micro-processors, etc., etc. There is also something on military uses of computers, the Club of Rome, and many other *bête noires* of the avant garde gauche. Not surprisingly, IBM comes in for stick. I liked the unconfirmed rumour that they had put the APL processor on a chip, but were avoiding letting the secret out because it would undermine their ulterior world-wide operations.

The author's comment on "professional priesthoods" should be taken to heart by Radstats members. *Mutatis mutandis*, he refers to 'The Statistical Priesthood' as follows:

Knowledge is power and so it tends to be hoarded. Experts in any field rarely want people to understand what they do, and generally enjoy putting people down.

Thus if we say that the use of statistics is dominated by a priesthood, people who spatter you with unintelligible answers and seem unwilling to give you straight ones. It is not that they are different in this respect from any other profession. Doctors, lawyers and constructing engineers are the same way.

2. MORI (1979) British Public Opinion: General Election 1979. Mimeo., circa 200 pp. Obtainable from Market and Opinion Research International, 29 Queen Anne's Gate, SW1H 9DD, price £10. Review by John Bibby.

This "final summing up" of MORI's work during the April/May election campaign contains enough tables to satisfy the most assiduous pollophile. I could not find anything on sample design or response rates, but the Appendix of press cuttings appears quite comprehensive. The following excerpt might interest RSN readers.

"The Unacceptable Mouth of Capitalism"

One further problem needs airing: this is the fourth General Election that I have been here that on the Monday and Tuesday before polling day the City has been swept by rumours that one or another of the major polls is coming out the following morning showing a sharp swing to Labour. In this election it was MORI, with a 3% Labour lead, in the Express. When it did not appear, it was 'being suppressed' and would appear in the next day's Express. The poll never existed, as we and the Daily Express told approximately 140 callers. According to the Financial Times, these rumours wiped hundreds of millions of pounds off share prices. I have asked the Chairman of the Stock Exchange to investigate. His reply is not encouraging. Our exchange of correspondence is in the Appendix."

3. "The Making of Symbolic Interactionism" Paul Rock: (London, MacMillan, 1979)

A Review by Lee Harvey

Rock has two aims in this text. The first aim is to explore and illuminate the philosophical underpinning of the symbolic interactionist perspective. This he does well, but not simply. He assumes the reader has some background knowledge of social philosophy and is cognisant with epistemological debate. However he does examine the particular features of Simmelian, Kantian, Hegelian and Pragmatist philosophy which impinge upon the interactionist perspective. Curiously, he includes some explanations in footnotes which are so located that the uninitiated will have long given up before they are reached and which are rather simplistic for the reader with background knowledge who has gone that far.

Rock's second aim is to show that symbolic interactionism is an alternative sociological orthodoxy. He is content that he has done this, witness the last two sentences of the book.

"Symbolic interactionism is not merely an inept or undeveloped version of orthodox sociology. It is an orthodox sociology which offers its own particular vision".

Symbolic interactionism, briefly, is a way of 'doing' sociology that emphasises the interactive process, that asserts that people's meanings are a product of interaction and that people handle and modify meanings through an interpretive process born of interaction and formalised through symbolic signals, notably language. Yet there are many 'varieties' of symbolic interactionism, and Rock attempts to distil out the basic elements through an exhaustive analysis of 'self' and to show what the roots of the perspective were. Unfortunately, this is a very complex task, not least of all because symbolic interactionism is an offshoot of interactionism in general (see Fisher and Strauss "Interactionism" in A History of Sociological Analysis, Bottamore and Nisbet, London, Heinemann, 1978) for a discussion of interactionism and the peripheral role of G.H. Mead, a central figure for the symbolic interactionists.)

Nonetheless Rock's work is well researched and affords the reader the benefit of a most scholarly examination of the roots of symbolic interactionism. He very cleverly shows how Simmel's social philosophy ties in with American pragmatism in the interactionist synthesis. The book is well written (although the style needs adjusting to, initially) but the casual Radical Statistics reader might find this book hard going and is unlikely to read it from cover to cover, unless already fairly well acquainted with the perspective. It is not really a text that provides the uninitiated with an easy guide to symbolic interactionism or its development.

4. Health Needs and Health Services in Rural Ghana

IDS Research Reports, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, Vol. 1, July 1978, £3.50; Vol. 2: Appendices, November, 1978, £3. (From Hermione Lovel)

An unusual type of health care research has recently been conducted in two districts of Ghana by a group from the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, in collaboration with the Ghanaian Ministry of Health and the University of Ghana. These two volumes are the final Research Report of this multidisciplinary project.

Volume 1 describes the methods and findings of the project. One of its two aims was to evaluate the quality, extent and limitations of existing primary health care (PHC) services in rural Ghana, at a time when it is increasingly realised that conventional health services in developing countries have largely failed to provide strategies for dealing with the areas of greatest need - access to basic care for most rural people, prevention of maternal and child mortality, the control of communicable diseases, and the allocation of resources designed to achieve these ends.

The task of evaluating the existing health services starts with the identification of a health services reference definition of expected performance as a yardstick. An itemised assessment is then made of the five areas which cover basic health services (polyclinics (curative) care, maternal care, child health, communicable disease control, and environmental health) to provide data on coverage, access and quality of service. The picture is filled out with data on costs, budgetary allocations and the availability and organisation of material and human resources, including staff utilisation, selection and training. Fragmentation of services and hyper-specialisation arising from inappropriate training, rigid career and authority structures emerge as major problems.

The other, linked, aim of the project was to consider the specific prospects for developing an effective PHC strategy in Ghana, using the model of community-based village health care. Proposals arising from the project and from other work by the Ministry of Health in Ghana seek to push the PHC focus towards the local communities of 200-500 people where two-thirds of Ghana's people live. To this end, an assessment was made of health needs from the perspective of the local community; and the role which could be played by communal labour and by other forms of community involvement in health activities. This required an understanding of the existing organisational and authority structure of Ghanaian villages. Also considered was the scope for multi-purpose village level health workers, and the consequent issues of training, supervision and phasing.

Throughout, the multidisciplinary contributions of economics, medicine and sociology are apparent and indispensable. Assessing the technical performance of the existing system required medical expertise; an economic study is made of resource allocation; the investigation of the actual and potential role of the community and of the structure of existing health services are sociological questions. The three approaches are tied together at the point of planning and costing future options.

Volume 2 of the Report is a series of detailed appendices which amplify the findings reported in Volume 1 and illustrate the project's methodology and fieldwork procedures; much of the material here is in the form of tables.