

Themes

Following comment on the last newsletter's editorial, it may be worth pointing out that our editorials do not reflect a collectively decided policy. They are the responsibility of the editor alone. This lamentable capitulation to bourgeois individualism is a practical necessity in this sort of organisation. In order to avoid confusion I haven't called this an editorial and I've signed it.

The editorial in the last newsletter put the case that cuts in government statistics should not be opposed. Disagreement on this issue was voiced at the AGM, and the debate is continued in correspondence printed in this newsletter.

This debate brought home to me the limitations of the (my ?) pragmatic approach to being a 'radical statistician'. The need to make a practical decision on whether to oppose cuts in government statistics rapidly exposed the shallowness of my understanding of the social role of statistics. There has recently been a fair amount printed on this general issue - 'Demystifying ...' and Dougal Hutchison's paper in BIAS spring to my mind - . I would guess, though, that typically we are still not very sure of our ground in these situations.

Three articles in this newsletter will I hope take us further in clarifying this area. John Bibby's is perhaps the most general, and is unusually bold in advocating a positive direction for statistical method, as well as analysing the negative impact of capitalism et al. Roy Carr-Hill's piece more specifically indicates a progressive role for the collection and use of social statistics. Jeff Evans looks at how ideas of 'statistical expertise' affect the conduct and understanding of educational research.

While general ideological questions are important in the long run, I am disappointed that we (including me) apparently have little to say about current issues with a statistical aspect. Local elections have recently added to the small number of councils with at the very least a rhetoric qualitatively more progressive than that of previous Labour administrations. The GLC is a notable example. Within the Labour Party, and to some extent outside it, a debate is going on on what policies are appropriate for a socialist local government in a capitalist Britain. Local government collects and uses statistics in various ways. Do we have no ideas, in particular or in general, to offer? Should we be asking people or organisations what the problems are that need radical statistical thought?

On the immediate question of the proposed cuts in the Government Statistical Services, a short informational piece is included. Work on some particular areas of cuts is being coordinated by Radical Statistical subgroups.

Ben Armstrong