

STATISTICS & SOUTH AFRICA

To follow up a brief item in Radstats No. 25 in which I suggested the need for alternative statistics to counter those used in South African government propaganda I introduced a short session on this topic at the Radstats AGM.

The materials produced by the South Africans make extensive use of statistics in putting forward a number of cases including:

- the argument that the West is completely dependent on South Africa for essential minerals and so must support the regime;
- the suggestion that the separate development of peoples in a constellation of racially segregated states is to the benefit of all;
- the assertion that South Africa is the key to development in the whole of that part of the continent and that to alter this would imperil the whole region.

The publications are expensively produced and obviously regarded as an important part of the ongoing propaganda effort to sustain support. They need to be countered by responsible statistics putting forward the alternative view of affairs in South Africa.

During the AGM I outlined briefly some of the work which has recently been done locally in Sheffield; particularly the contributions to the recent U.N. conference on Apartheid held in the city.

I also highlighted some of the areas into which Radstats effort might be directed. The trade issues have already been dealt with - though on an E.E.C. basis - by Barbara Rogers & Brian Bolton in 'Sanctions against South Africa' (1981) but more could be done from a specifically U.K. angle. Another area of importance is the presentation of statistics relating to conditions for workers in South Africa and in particular for employees of U.K.-based firms. Some unions have been seeking 'clean' investments for their funds and this is an obvious area where the South African connection impinges. Other issues which might be addressed include comparative studies of living conditions of South African racial groups.

Discussion on this topic at the AGM was generally favourable to some activity being initiated although there were some cautionary comments about the breadth of the proposed work. It was also pointed out that there could usefully be coordination with other Radstats groups; the Health and Nuclear groups were specially relevant. The meeting gave its support to the suggestion that I coordinate the work of a new Group on South Africa and a number of people indicated their willingness to become involved in its activities. If you would also like to work with us on this project please contact me on Sheffield (0742-) 20911 Ext.391 or write to me in the Maths Stats & D.R. Department at Sheffield City Polytechnic.

Jim Bryant