

EDITOR'S PAGE

The eighth conference and AGM has come and gone. Besides being full of good 'vibes', it certainly produced a number of stimulating discussions and exciting suggestions for things to do. Now that the dust is settling a bit, a number of the more ambitious ideas are being toned down or put to one side, while others are hopefully being built up into practicable projects and activities (See inside, esp. Groups and Projects).

This peaking of energy at the AGM, followed rapidly by a falling off again, is not a new phenomenon: it certainly happened last year (and probably the year before). I do not think it comes about only because we are all ageing - it also depends on the following:

- (i) most active Radstats members are heavily committed elsewhere including to work-related projects and campaigns (as 'non-expert' participants);
- (ii) we are still learning how to offer new or potential members a range of possible activities that would seem both challenging and practically feasible for them;
- (iii) the Group has so far lacked a forum for sustained consideration of what directions our collective work needs to develop.

None of this is to deny that 1982-83 was a good year for us. Membership increased; the Health and Education Groups brought out Two Statistical Methods for Assessing Health Hazards at Work and Reading between the Numbers respectively; the Nuclear Disarmament Group followed up the Nuclear Numbers Game with press releases and talks; the Race Group began work on the second edition of Britain's Black Population; and Demystifying Social Statistics was translated into Japanese.

So how can we keep up this momentum, and increase our effectiveness in contributing to the development of a critical Statistics, and to political campaigns and struggles aiming to create a socialist society? A number of suggestions have been proposed by members at the AGM, or within subgroups, and are now being considered by the Steering Group; critical discussion and elaboration of these by RSN readers, as well as further suggestions, are needed.

- (i) We should step up recruitment of new members, especially among younger statisticians, researchers and teachers, as well as students. Publicity material is currently being designed by the Steering Group; ideas to Ian Miles, please.
- (ii) We need to develop new ways of working, especially in subgroups, which allow both overcommitted members and energetic new recruits to find challenging and useful things to do, while maintaining what seems to them a congenial level of commitment. For example, each subgroup needs to offer a spectrum of possible contributions ranging between "pamphlet co-author" and "passive meeting attendee". Ideas, especially from subgroups, to the Steering Group and/or this Newsletter.
- (iii) We need to make our "political work" into "paid work" wherever possible: the other side does! For example, one of the authors of the Scientists against Nuclear Arms (SANA's) London against the Bomb has been able to turn a part-time "political" interest into full-time research. Ideas were aired at the AGM for getting research grants for pursuing e.g. Anti-Social Trends - related work.

- (iv) We need to accept that members may move back and forth between Radstats work and work in various campaigns and political parties. Thus, it may not be a bad thing if, say, the Nuclear Disarmament Group is temporarily inactive, if its members are working in local groups of CND etc.

- (v) We need to find ways of articulating and developing directions in which our collective concerns and work might grow. At its last meeting, the Steering Group highlighted the need to move on from the critiques we have produced (e.g. Demystifying, Unofficial Guide, Nuclear Numbers, Reading between the Numbers) to a discussion of the radical use of Statistics; this need was apparent during our discussion on Statistics of the Cuts. (Also the Health Group pointed to this need in the Conclusion to their second edition of the Unofficial Guide.) For the beginnings of Steering Group thinking on the issue, see "Statistics of the Cuts: A possible strategy" (pp. 11-12).

A number of issues related to campaigns and struggles in Western Europe, as well as the 3rd World, are highlighted in this Newsletter. In particular, we carry on the discussion of Women and Official Statistics, from the AGM, and publish an excellent report on the cuts in statistics, given in an earlier version at the AGM.

Thanks to all contributors, Denise Lievesley for helping with the editing of the first feature article, Heather Booth for cartoons, Taylor Evans and Pam Atkinson for typing. Now it's over to you.

Jeff Evans

May 1983

Letter

To The Editors, Radical Statistics Newsletter

Dear Madam and Sir,

In March, a letter from the President of the Royal Statistical Society appeared in the Guardian under the heading 'How the Police Bill's powers of search will shackle statisticians'. The letter said:

Sir,- The Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, now in committee stage in the Commons, has been criticised by representatives of the medical and legal professions and of the clergy.

The proposed extension of the powers of the police to search for evidence of a "serious arrestable offence" is likely to have a serious effect also on research in the medical and social sciences, which relies on statistical surveys.

Respondents in surveys are normally assured that the information they provide will be used for statistical purposes only. If it became apparent that confidentiality could be broken by police searches, however rare, the cooperation of the public might be irrevocably damaged: the community would then be deprived of sources of information which are important for its continued well-being.

I hope that the proposed powers of search will be sufficiently restricted at the present committee stage to enable bona fide research workers to maintain the confidentiality of their data.-

Yours faithfully,
(Prof) P. Armitage,
Royal Statistical Society,
London W1.

The RSS is one of many bodies concerned about the proposed powers of the police to gain access to confidential records. In April, The Home Secretary announced exemptions: the confidential records of doctors and other caring professions, with the promise of exemptions for confidential records held by legal or financial advisors. It seems that statistical records are not exempt. Does this include government surveys, the census, and administrative records(DHSS, Home Office, etc)? Should we be concerned about this?

Yours sincerely,

Heather Booth

Heather Booth



from the Guardian

Review

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from The Guardian

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