

Letter from Alex Scott Samuel

Would you please raise the following at the next Health Group meeting or in the Newsletter? I think we need to produce something documenting the effects of Thatcherism on the public health. Ideally this should contain as much hard data as possible (eg: SMR's, age-specific mortality rates, HAA, clinic attendances, nutritional content of school meals, mental illness and suicide), but I appreciate that it's early days yet and we'll probably all be dead by the time the figures become available (bombs not old age). The thing about qualitative information is that (i) it's not as telling and (ii) there would be some overlap, for example with NHS Unlimited. Anyway I'd be grateful for people's proposals and contributions on this.

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Health Group

At the first of our proposed series of discussion meetings, Tony Ades and Ben Armstrong presented the fruits of their scrutiny of Doll and Peto's 'The causes of cancer'. In particular, they criticised the way Doll and Peto emphasised smoking while not appearing to question the reasons why people take up and continue smoking. Tony, Ben and Dave Leon, who was also involved have discussed producing a written version, but are not clear at present what form it will take. For further information, contact Tony Ades (01 340 9997)

This meeting was successful because it was the result of considerable effort on the part of two or three people and the rest of us, who had made no effort at all were able to benefit from it! The second discussion meeting was not at all successful as a discussion of 'Health care and its costs', a little publicised document which had clearly been plundered by those making the speeches which conned the electorate into thinking that the NHS was safe with the Conservative party. Only one of us had actually read the document and that was a somewhat cursory scan of it. We had, however, been overtaken by events, in that we had been approached for statistical help by two groups fighting the post election NHS cuts. As a result we decided to attempt a critique of the document and the NHS 'performance indicators' which are an integral part of it. At the same time, we shall try to obtain information about the cuts and comment on it. This seems to fit in with the groundwork needed to do what Alex Scott Samuel proposes.

We are now considering how to go about this. It is essential to make only modest and limited plans, given the failure of previous Radical Statistics initiatives on the cuts. Also we are in a depleted state, being for the time being without David Jones, Ben Armstrong, and Martin Bland all of whom have contributed a great deal to our activities. This ought to give us a greater incentive, to not only recruit new people, but more importantly to overcome our bad habit of concentrating our activities in the London area. As we don't have the resources to go round collecting information about the cuts ourselves, we shall have to rely on getting it from those who do. This means that people's local contacts will be essential. Anyone who wishes to contribute should contact Derek Cook (01 202 4012) or Alison Macfarlane (St Albans 52111).

What is happening to the relaxed discussion meetings? No further ones are planned for the time being, but anyone who has anything to present and discuss would be more than welcome.

Nuclear Group

Discussion about a further major project petered out, mainly because those who did the discussing were too involved with other things to be able to take on anything else. At the same time, there seem to be a considerable number of people around elsewhere who do have time to do such things, so it doesn't look as if there is a need for us to take on a new project. Meanwhile we have continued to deal with various enquiries which come our way.

In the summer, we held a meeting at which Stephen Shenfield presented his talk on estimating the probability of nuclear war, a written version of which was promised for this newsletter*. Gavin Ross also talked about his notes about decision theory and nuclear war, which had been circulating for some time and which he has contributed to the newsletter.

We have also been following up the suggestion which three of us made to the Royal Statistical Society that it should hold a discussion meeting on estimating the effects of nuclear war. The proposal was that members of SANA and Home Office scientists should present their work for discussion by statisticians. The last we heard was that the Home Office could not find anyone to present its case, but that the RSS is going ahead with the meeting anyway.

Race Group Report

The Race Group has been rather inactive recently despite our agreement to write a second edition of Britain's Black Population. We have, in fact, failed dismally to keep to our agreed timetable and are now at least six months behind. However, this does give people the opportunity to join...there may still be room for some help if anyone is interested. Heather Booth, RUER, St Peter's College, College Road, Birmingham B8 3TE. Tel: 021 327 0194.

Women In Statistics

Several people have expressed an interest in forming a Women In Statistics group. The woman who originally offered to coordinate the group is now unable to do so. If anyone is interested in taking over this task and getting the group going, please write to:

Women In Statistics, RSG, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG.

NB. 'Women in Government Statistics' - talk by P.V. Allin (Equal Opportunities Commission), 24 November, London School of Hygiene, 5 pm. (organised by Government Statistical Service Study Group).

*Perhaps in the next one - Ed.

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Education Group

We have not made any further progress with our project on resources and attainment, but we have not been entirely idle. We have sold nearly all of the first print of Reading Between the Numbers (2000 copies) and have just ordered a reprint of another 1000. The pamphlet has generated some interest amongst teachers and we have given talks at Norwich Teacher's Centre and in Tower Hamlets. The press, the TES in particular, has carried a number of articles where the inferences, such as supporting selection at 11, have been based on fundamental statistical errors and we have done our best to combat them in the letters columns. Recently, we contributed to a discussion of educational research which will form an audio-cassette for a new Open University course (E205). Anyone interested in joining the group would be very welcome: contact Ian Plewis (01 278 2424 ext. 264) in the first instance.

C.R.S. study group on "Probability Theory and the Nuclear Peril"
Newsletter No.1

Following the seminar given by Stephen Shenfield on 1st June, the Council of the Conflict Research Society approved the formation of a C.R.S. study group which would apply probability theory to the study of nuclear war.

The aims of the study group will initially be quite modest:

- (a) to provide a communication network in this field;
- (b) to organise one or two seminars a year under the auspices of the CRS.

In pursuit of the first aim I am preparing a Directory for our study group. Please let me know of any papers you have written in this area. The CRS Council will soon be planning its 1983-84 seminar programme. Suggestions or offers of papers for our "probability theory ..." slot in this programme would be welcome.

Although we did not discuss this explicitly at our meeting, it may strengthen our group if we conceive of our topic quite broadly. Thus Stephen's initial letter mentioned reliability theory, game theory and decision theory. In addition, at the seminar, reference was made to catastrophe theory, and to models of the arms race. Reference was also made to the relevance of psychological studies in this area. It may be that our first seminar should explore the modelling of the psychological aspects of our problem.

It may be that you are interested in peace research in general as well as your specific interest in the applications of mathematics and statistics in this area. If so, you may be interested in a draft introductory guide to peace research which I have prepared for the CRS.

28th June, 1983

Best wishes

Gordon Burt
IET
Open University.