

Radical Statistics Tenth Birthday Weekend

SATURDAY AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 23

The afternoon's festivities took the form of two talks with associated discussion. We were joined by new members and visitors from York and other places in the North of England, as it was an open meeting.

While the first speakers were finishing photocopying their handouts, Mike Hill asked whether our mailing list could be made public, and in particular, whether it could be circulated to trades union officials who, like him, could do with sympathetic statistical advice. The fact that some people did not wish their names and addresses to be circulated in this way but were still very willing to give such advice led to a discussion of how we could provide a better network of statistical help and at the same time benefit ourselves from wider contacts. It was decided to include a form in this newsletter so that people could offer help while indicating whether or not their name could be circulated. (p.38)

Roy Calk Hill and Bob Lavers then talked about the poverty surveys done in York in 1899, 1936 and 1950 by Seebohm Rowntree and the follow up in 1976 of the offspring of those surveyed in 1950. Much of the discussion centred around Rowntree's concept of a poverty line which was based on assessments of the costs of providing basic essentials for families of different sizes which were then compared with the families' actual incomes. This has some relevance to modern methods of setting Supplementary Benefit levels. (see article on p.26)

Roy Moore, from Ruskin College, Oxford then gave a very stimulating talk about the economic and statistical background to miners' strike and the arguments about the definition of uneconomic pits. By focussing on inflation, the Government has ignored two key economic variables, output and unemployment. In setting cash limits for public expenditure, sales of assets are set against current expenditure, something which accountants in the private sector would not consider valid.

In defining pits as 'uneconomic', the Government includes in operating losses such things as past subsidence, past pensions and interest payments, at twice the level of those in public industry, on loans from the Government. In

calculating the costs of closure, however, it ignores redundancy and social security payments, loss of production, loss of income tax and multiplier effects on suppliers.

Discussion of this talk led on to the wider question of the role of Radical Statistics in demystifying complex arguments of this type. As a result it was decided to look into the possibility of writing a pamphlet on the Rate Support Grant. Mike Hill agreed to coordinate a working group to pursue the matter further and Mike Derbyshire was identified as a major contributor.

SATURDAY EVENING

Many thanks to Roy and Debbie who hosted an excellent party at which a good time was had by all, and also to the locals who put the rest of us up for the night.

SUNDAY MORNING FEBRUARY 24

This was a short but fruitful business meeting, with a surprisingly wide ground being covered.

Financial The cost of producing newsletters had risen even though they had become "slimmer". This means that we may need to put up the subscription next year. Our various bank accounts had a total of some £2500 in them.

Future funding Dave Saunders suggested that we could make more progress if we had a paid worker and suggested that we should raise subscriptions and seek other funding. Other people felt this to be politically undesirable and/or impractical. It was suggested that we could pay for Kate Godwin, BSSRS' office worker to do extra hours for our benefit, and the new Troika was asked to follow this up.

Newsletters Editors have been found for the next three newsletters. They are Cathie Marsh, Liz Atkins and Russel Ecob.

Reports from subgroups/new activities. The Race Group is talking about rewriting Britain's Black Population and the Health Group is debunking myths about 'the national health'. The Law Group, which has only one member, Roy Carr Hill, who would welcome more, is working on the use of statistics in legal evidence. Dave Drew still wants to convene a subgroup to write a pamphlet on surveys for pressure groups, but does not have time at present. Mike Hill is going to coordinate work on the Rate Support Grant.

Trades union contacts. It was suggested we look to see if there is a need for day conferences for trades unionists on either statistics or doing surveys. Also, we need to look at trades unionists' and their officials' need for statistics and determine the extent to which they don't require statistics, the extent to which they do need them and their need is satisfied and the extent

of unmet need. John Bibby will contact Roy Moore and union research and education departments. The exception is health unions. Alison Macfarlane will raise this matter with them when contacting them about the cuts (see Health Group report)

Mailing list/networking. There should be many more names given as contacts in the newsletter, covering both subjects and geographical areas. A form should be put in the newsletter to ascertain peoples' interests and lists of people who can be contacted but don't want their names circulated should be drawn up from this.

Publicity/recruitment. Concern was expressed that we have too few members under 30. Therefore among conference presences, we shall concentrate on young statisticians and young OR conferences to try to recruit younger people to try to counteract the undesirable tendency of existing members to get older. John Bibby agreed to run a recruitment drive after the move from 9 Poland Street is complete, and he agreed to join the Troika with this specific responsibility alone.

It was suggested that we should offer to edit an issue of Science for People and the Troika will look into this. It was suggested that such an issue should cover statistics for the labour movement, demystification, statistics and surveys for trades unionists and statistics for other groups. A meeting should be called in about 3 months to plan contents.

BSSRS It was explained that a new office would have to be found as BSSRS has to leave Poland Street in July and will have to find about £1000 a year for rent. Several possible premises were being investigated.

It was agreed to reaffiliate and make a larger contribution, including some asset stripping. The nuclear group will give £300 and the other subgroups £150 to the central Radical Statistics account, and the Troika will transfer this to BSSRS when suitable arrangements concerning assistance have been made. Membership forms and forms for the fighting fund which pays Kate's (shamefully low) salary are being circulated with this newsletter to encourage individuals to contribute.

Troika. Dave Saunders, Russell Ecob and John Bibby emerged as the Troika. It was agreed to apportion tasks for the year with Dave dealing with membership and subscriptions, John with recruitment and Russell with other enquiries and activities.

Advance Notice

RSS Discussion Meeting.

'The Statistical Considerations associated with nuclear materials', speaker: Terry Speed. Open University, Wednesday 22 January, 1986.

Radical Statistics AGM 1986

National Children's Bureau, Saturday 22 February, 1986