

Membership drive

At the AGM in February it was decided to mount a membership drive at the beginning of the new academic year, with especial focus on "young blood".

A recruitment leaflet has been prepared, and several copies are enclosed with this mailing. Extra copies have been sent to those of you who are at a college or university address - please will you circulate these among your students, pointing out the advantages of membership of this magnificent organisation.

The leaflet has been prepared so that you can make extra photocopies at your own institution. Alternatively, please write to the Troika for extra copies (address inside front cover).

Book reviews

Ian Miles: Social Indicators for Human Development, United Nations University, £17.50.

Ian Miles's new book 'comes out of a process of discussion among researchers within a network of twenty-three institutes in different countries', which make up the UNU project on 'Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development'. Thus Ian is acting to some extent as rapporteur of UNU discussions, and to some extent expressing his own views - although the proportion of each is not always clear. This brings both advantages and disadvantages.

Thus the book is a useful catalogue with brief general discussion of a broad range of aspects of the social indicator field (not all - thus there is little reference to social indicator models for example). The problem is that when Ian is wearing his rapporteur's hat, much of the critical edge is blunted and all approaches are, in spite of reservations, considered 'useful' (to who? when?). The State comes too close, to my mind, to being regarded as a neutral arbiter of a 'variety of social pressures', while excluding the use of social indicator to mean any social statistic (although embracing almost any other meaning), Ian seems rather optimistic about the use, in SI construction, of the economic and demographic data most commonly available in third world countries - but which ones are useful, how and to who is not always clear.

On other topics ('subjective' indicators, attempts at measuring welfare-adjusted GNP) the criticisms come through much more clearly. And it is perhaps no accident that the chapter on social accounting schemes, including ones proposed by Ian himself, is much more incisive.

One slight personal gripe: in his reference to Roy Garr-Hill's and my work, Ian attributes to us the claim that 'the urge to measurement is at root an urge for social control'. This is far from being our view (of the RadStats pamphlet on SIs). What we do say, unlike Ian, is that the State is about social control; and since it is also the principal manufacturer of social data, social control is a major influence on what is produced. But we'd also argue for the possibility of people's social indicators, and even, after critical examination, the re-use in constructing such SIs of some existing State-produced social data.

John Lintott

Roger Davidson (1985), Whitehall and the Labour Problem in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. London: Croom Helm, 293pp., \$18.95p.

As the author makes clear, the "labour problem" of this book's title is misnamed, being essentially a problem of capital. At the turn of the century, like today, when you hear reference to "the labour problem", you can be sure it is capital speaking.

In the 1890's, the problem had three main strands: chronic unemployment, industrial unrest, and widespread poverty. Taken separately, these threatened the economic, political, and moral ease of late Victorian society. Taken together, they could have overthrown it.

How did this come about, especially so soon after the prosperous consensus which continued into the 1870's? How did labour suddenly become a 'problem'? These important questions, investigated by Dr. Davidson, are for economic historians and sociologists of knowledge. Statisticians must also consider how it was that the 1890's constituted a decade of unparalleled progress and historical importance for the subject - the "birth of modern statistics", as it has been called. This decade saw Pearson start work at University College, Bowley at LSE, and could also have seen a Chair in Statistics at the University of Oxford, had Jowett's plan with Florence Nightingale not been thwarted by Galton.

Simultaneously, the civil service was coming under pressure to evolve and improve its statistics. "We cannot make bricks without straw" cried Alfred Marshall in criticising the Census. The labour "problem" certainly eased developments in this area. In part this was due to increased receptiveness, and links forged by Bowley and Marshall among others (Pearson remained aloof). However, above all (and there is surely a parallel here today), developments were due to allocation of resources. Expenditure on labour statistics increased six-fold during the 1890's, and manpower allocated to the problem increased similarly.

All this is thoroughly documented in Dr. Davidson's book. However, the expansion of statistical work must be judged in ideological rather than technical terms, as emphasised in the book's subtitle, A study in official statistics and social control. The author's thorough yet lively account of the cut and thrust of the statistical and political debates, the social and economic background, and the personalities involved, illustrate above all the fundamental conservatism of official statistical philosophy. Lack of statistics was easily turned to advantage, as with the "miserably defective" unemployment statistics which, it was noted in 1895, provided a "convenient basis of ignorance" with which to defuse awkward questions. For 1895, read 1985? And for unemployment, read earnings, wealth, health, or happiness?

Having said this, in the 1890's there seems to have been a far less rigid dividing line between civil service statisticians and the universities than exists today. (Industrial and commercial statisticians were all but nonexistent.) Subsequent professionalisation led to considerable specialisation within the profession, which will not necessarily continue. For, although the labour problem is ever with us (why do we never have a "capital problem?"), we now also have the "information problem" - or is it panacea? - which could signal the knell of the statistical profession as we know it.

JOHN BIBBY

Letters

British Society for Social Responsibility in Science

President: Professor Maurice Wilkins FRS

NEW ADDRESS:
25 HORSELL ROAD
LONDON N5 1XL
TEL: 01 607 9615

10 October 1985

Dear Liz Atkins

I understand from Dave Saunders that you're editor of the next Rad. Stats. Newsletter and I'd be grateful if you could include in it details of our forthcoming conference.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE NEW COLD WAR

Saturday 30 November at Imperial College, London

Speakers: Owen Greene, Sheena Phillips,

Martin Ince, Peter Tatchell

Topics: Star Wars; Nuclear Winter; Gender and the

Arms Race; Arms Conversion; Military

Exports and the Third World; New Technology

in NATO's strategy; Nuclear State's Threat

to Civil Liberties.

Details: Kate Godwin, BSERS, 25 Horsell Rd, London N5 1XL

ph. 01-607-9615

Many thanks

Kate Godwin
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Office Co-ordinator



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

22-24 Underwood Street,
London N1 7JG.

Tel. 01 250 4010

5 July 1985

Dear *Radical Statistics Nuclear Disarmament Group,*

I am writing to you because your organisation appears on our Specialist Contact List and it seems as if your input would be particularly useful in our parliamentary monitoring network which was set up just 11 months ago, and already covers nearly 500 of the 650 constituencies.

A monitor receives the same monthly briefings which we send out to MPs at Westminster on a wide variety of topics ranging from Britain's record at the United Nations to different types of weapons systems and their implications for disarmament. We attach a sheet which indicates what has been happening in Parliament, what will be happening and try to give some idea of how the place works and what various terms (Early Day Motions, oral and written questions etc.) mean and what their significance is. If an MP says something about defence and disarmament in the House, an excerpt from Hansard is sent to the monitor, whose job it is to establish some sort of dialogue, through letters and/or visits with the MP and to discuss in a serious, non-confrontational way, the issue of the arms race and how best to stop it. We hope this will lead to more informed representatives, a higher standard of debate, and a better climate at the next election.

But these monitors need help! We have asked each one of them to set up a lobby rota in their constituency, of people who would be willing to write the occasional letter or pay the occasional visit to their MP in his/her surgery. This is where professional or religious groups such as your own would be most helpful. Would you be willing to advertise the monitors' network in your newsletter, and ask people to get in touch with me if they would like to help convince their MP that disarmament is important? Often MPs are more influenced by doctors, lawyers, teachers and others with "status" in the community. Enclosed is one of our introductory leaflets. Perhaps you could put a clip out coupon in your newsletter or next mailing asking people to put their name and address and name of MP or constituency and ask them to return it to me at Underwood Street. (Our new address after 20 July will be 22-24 Underwood Street, London N17JQ. I will then let the relevant monitor know that your member has agreed to help, and they can liaise locally.

This sort of project worked with great effect in New Zealand, where they now have a Government committed to a non-nuclear policy. Our task is much greater, but we know we can do the same with your help.

Please let me know if you have questions, hesitations or just want further details.

Yours sincerely,

Marjorie Thompson
Marjorie Thompson/Parliamentary Worker

Nicaragua Must Survive

Steve Simpson

In January - February next year, I am going as one of a 'shuttle of technicians' working in Nicaragua for two to four weeks at a time. I have been allocated to the National Bureau of Statistics in Managua.

I am collecting as much material and cash to take with me, and I would like to specifically support the work of the Bureau and of statistics teaching in Nicaragua.

Statistics books of any kind, but particularly textbooks and practical manuals, statistical tables, calculators and any other equipment would be appreciated. All office and educational equipment is desperately needed; Biro's, pencils and paper are a high priority, constantly in short supply.

Cash will either be used to buy priority material that I can get before leaving, or will be taken for the Bureau to use as it sees fit. (Cheques to S. Simpson; I will send a receipt and later a report on how the money was used)

Visitors report that these needs are more pressing now than they have been at any time during the six years since Nicaragua embarked on a path of development 'independent from imperialism's interests'. The progress on social and educational programmes has been 'exemplary' (Oxfam), but is now so severely limited by the US government's complete embargo on trade and by the need to repel continual war on Nicaragua's borders, that the 'Nicaragua Must Survive' campaign has been launched by the Nicaraguan government itself.

They ask you to respond as best you can. Perhaps my visit can help a wider response from Statisticians. Please ask other people at your workplace to respond too. I will of course write a report for Radstats Newsletter when I return.

Steve Simpson: 242 Keighley Road, Bradford, BD9 4JZ. Tel; (0274) 499540.

PS. Are there other RSN readers already involved in Nicaragua support?

PPS. The shuttle of technicians is organised from TecNICA in the USA. You are responsible for travel there and an administration fee. It has been mainly computer technicians over the past two years, but is broadening in skills offered - otherwise I wouldn't be going! I have an address and more information for those interested.

