

Editorial

Introductory Remarks

The editorial team has changed; we are now three, and straddle the length of Britain, with Alastair Greig in Dundee, Larry Brownstein in Leeds and myself in London.

Apologies are due for the lateness of production of the conference issue. The new team was only set up at the Annual General Meeting and it has taken time for us to coordinate the work. In addition progress has been delayed by my own ill-health. Fortunately out-going editor, Jane Galbraith, continues to add her support and the Troika has been very helpful. The prospects are good for future issues.

Note that the Conference Issue is in two parts, #104 and #105. In the past there had been problems with binding and printing of overly large issues, so caution has prevailed and material is divided between Part I and Part II. The AGM papers will appear in Part II.

Janet Shapiro

Cuts & Corporations

The Radical Statistics Annual Conference 2011, held at the newly opened Heart Centre in Leeds was very successful with a record attendance. There was a full programme of papers that focussed on the twin themes of the ongoing effects of the coalition's financial cuts and the increasing influence of corporations.

This issue includes four of these conference presentations and two workshops based on the presentations.

One issue that has been a thorn in the side of many scientists at least since Simon Singh published his book on homeopathy (co-authored with Edzard Ernst) is litigation in the area of science criticism. Dr Peter Wilmshurst presented a harrowing and yet very humorous account of what began with his participation as principal cardiologist in a sponsored clinical trial. This involvement led to severe and painful disruption of his career and family life over three years, caused by extended legal action. His commitment to professional integrity left him victim to UK libel laws, and his case is not alone. There are other examples of scientists being sued for libel for scientific presentations and research publications. This should be a concern for scientists, statisticians and the public, restricting as it does scientific communication.

Speaking before Dr Wilmshurst, Stuart Parkinson, Executive Director Scientists for Global Responsibility, presented an analysis that anticipated the experiences reported by Peter Wilmshurst. He argued that, while links are increasing between business and science and technology, there is growing evidence that the science

commercialisation agenda brings with it a wide range of detrimental effects, including bias, conflicts of interest, a narrowing of the research agenda, and misrepresentation of research results. All of these can reduce the reliability of statistics based on scientific research. Stuart permits the reprint of an article dated 2009 presenting evidence for these effects across five sectors: pharmaceuticals; tobacco; military/defence; oil and gas; and biotechnology. Recommendations are made for improving the openness, independence and reliability of academic research.

The opening presentation was given by Jay Ginn and Susan Himmelweit. With illustrative charts they refuted the government's claim that its measures to reduce the financial-sector-created deficit are designed to be 'fair', that is distributing the pain across the whole of society. Vulnerable groups were shown to be suffering the worst effects of the package of cuts and tax changes, particularly older people and women. The authors' paper *'Unkindest Cuts: the impact on older people'* has already been published in *Radical Statistics* #103; this was covered in the presentation. The paper printed here covers the additional material without duplication.

Alan Franco spoke on his article published in #103, *'From Witney to Wigan: How national changes to welfare benefit rules have a differential impact on local communities'*. He presented further analysis that demonstrated that while significant cuts in the levels of welfare benefits and tax credits are typically portrayed as 'targeting help on those most in need', a geographical analysis of their differential impact on communities suggests that significant disinvestment in Britain's most impecunious communities is underway. Alan's data can be retrieved from the website, but no paper is included.

A similar message was conveyed in Howard Reed's presentation that showed that the poorer you are the more the cuts bite and vice versa, which is the opposite of what the government has claimed about them. The work carried out for the TUC by Horton, T. and Reed, H. *'Where the Money Goes: How we benefit from public services'*, cited by Ginn & Himmelweit, is an invaluable source for evidence. Permission has been given to summarise Howard's presentation and this will appear in Part II #105.

Victoria Johnson's presentation on the redefinition of wealth and progress argued that it is impossible to have a growth economy indefinitely. She began with a thought experiment on a hamster eating and thereby growing - which if allowed to continue - would eventually outstrip the world's food supply for it. A real experiment of this kind was carried out in the mid-20th century by an experimental psychologist, Teitelbaum. Upon ablation of a rat's ventro-medial hypothalamus, he discovered that the rat ate until it became so large that it was unable to move to obtain food and eventually died of

starvation. Both experiments, one conceptual the other real, show that indefinite growth leads to a community exceeding the carrying capacity of its environment with catastrophic consequences. A further upshot of developing a new attitude to growth is the necessity of reassessing the implications of population growth and its inextricable relationship to the carrying capacity of the earth.

At the end of the afternoon we broke up into groups to discuss what activities could be conducted between AGMs. Two of the workshops are presented here. One, led by Women's Budget Group, considered the effectiveness of equality impact assessments (EIAs) of government policy on gender and other inequalities. The other, led by Dr Wilmshurst, examined how libel law operates in the UK and the implications. The workshop concluded with a call for support for the Libel Reform Campaign petition.

The editors hope to trace a report of the third workshop 'Cuts to Government Social Research Budgets and Ongoing Projects since May 2010: Increasing the Evidence Deficit?'. This was led by Simon Tanner. Please let us know if you attended that one. Hopefully it could be reported in Part II #105 together with full records from the Annual General Meeting that was held during the lunch break.

We hope that #104 does justice to a very successful conference, for which we thank Paul Marchant and the Troika and other organisers for their hard work.

In addition to conference papers #104 includes several other items that have accumulated during the delay in publication. These include Jane Galbraith's response to Danny Dorling's reply in #103 and articles by Ecob, Marchant and Noble. Russell Ecob proposes an alternative proportional representation voting system and Paul Marchant questions whether new street lighting schemes have reduced crime in London. Hugh Noble's commentary is designed to raise the level of discussion on the 'Spirit Level'.

The Troika are given the last word reporting on recent decisions and offering promotional material for *Radical Statistics*.

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