

## EDITORIAL NOTE

This note is intended to provide a context for the following items, since the collective editing the present Newsletter were not entirely certain about their reception in the context of the Newsletter alone.

In order, the two following items are (1) a paper entitled "Statistics at Work" by George Hay, and (2) a copy of the letter with which John Irvine, a member of the current collective, acknowledged its receipt. One purpose which we felt might be served by publishing these items was that of stimulating discussion upon the editorial policy of the Newsletter - and thereby helping in the definition of the Radical Statistics Group itself. At the September Conference, such issues were raised, but a further discussion in the pages of this Newsletter would be welcome.

To situate these items a little more precisely, we should explain that George Hay is a committee member of a group named "Spectrum", and is co-ordinator of its Environmental Action sub-group. According to material that accompanied the paper, Spectrum is an organisation which aims "to encourage, by promotion and demonstration, the advancement of mankind through the proper and responsible application of science and technology". It thinks vertically and laterally in the areas of civic, political and industrial interest, using a fourth environmental area as a form of safeguard. "We believe that an optimistic outlook on the future is essential for mankind's success and intend to encourage this by the practical production of realistic solutions to problems, particularly in the social, political and environmental areas, many of which are being at present considered out of their proper overall context. Publicity for the reasons behind this alone could do much to dispel present fears for the future and replace them with eager anticipation." Included was a five-point plan involving (a) stimulating interest in science fiction, (2) ideas on "human and possible non-human activity both on and off our planet Earth from the immediate to the far future", (3) contact with and promotion of organisations with similar orientations, (4) gaining resources, (5) increasing public interest and "the recruitment of specific private individuals in order to further our aims for the benefit of the community". Spectrum has sub-groups working on population control, large-scale earth-moving projects for the creation of new land and marine communities, environmental action exhibitions, multi-purpose mass produced space modules, earth orbiting vehicles, future oriented games, science fiction writing, etc.

## STATISTICS AT WORK

Complaints of inefficiency in business education and government are routine, coming from all points of the political spectrum. However, they generally fail of their effect because they boil down to a matter of one person's word against another's. "Joe is a lousy Manager". "As a shorthandteacher, Maggie Smith would make a fine weight-lifter". "There are ten people standing around this machine, when four would be ample". Such statements get one nowhere, since they contain no objective proof of anything. They are not measurements.

I would like to see set up one or two pilot experiments in small establishments containing people working at different but related jobs - schools, businesses, laboratories, workshops, whatever. Having reached prior agreement - we hope - on the overall goal of the group, the output of each individual is given a specific statistic, and these measured over a period of time, and related to each other via overall graphs.

Before going any further with this proposal, let me make it clear that I am well aware of the fact that this is a technique easily susceptible of abuse, and one which can only be rewarding if judgement and tolerance be exercised by those who take part in it and administer it. I have worked on the factory floor with a man standing behind me with a stopwatch, so, as I say, I know how this system can be made not to work. However, this is no reason for not using it. One can commit suicide with aspirins, but that is no reason for not taking them when one has a headache. This point needs to be clear here, otherwise I am sure the reader would be muttering "Yes, but" under his breath, instead of giving full attention to my proposal.

Each member's statistic is based on his or her main activity. The typist's stat. is LETTERS OUT. The telephonist's is CALLS HANDLED. The sales manager's is SALES CONTRACTED FOR. And so on. Of course, there are always those who say "Well, that can't apply to me. I handle quality, and my work can't be turned into a figure". I can only say I have yet to come across a case where this remark could be proved - and I mean that one can assign a stat. that is genuinely related to the work, not just fudged up to prove the point. Two things need to be remembered. First, we are measuring quantity, not quality. Second, quality does however, in actual fact, always relate itself to quantity. Suppose we have two teachers, Miss Brown and Miss Black, the first being good and the second busy. We assign them one stat. for number of pupils in class each day, and another for pupils passing exams. Miss Brown may prefer to discourage disinterested pupils, so this gives her a low attendance stat. Miss Black pulls into her class anything that can sit upright and breathe, so her attendance figure is outstanding. On passed, however, she will fail, and in subsequent terms the stat. if there is one, for applications to join the class of a particular teacher would be much higher with Miss Brown.

A further advantage of this system is that by setting out the stats in graph form and reading them across in relation to each other, the administrator can see ahead of time the effect of one department's output on that of another. If the division responsible for ordering stationery has fallen down on the job - as shown by ORDERS MADE/ORDERS RECEIVED - it is as well to know beforehand, when one can still do something about it, rather than wait for the day when the typists are sitting there with nothing in their machines. Similarly, if output is exceptionally high at the left-hand or input side of the graph, then Admin. can warn the other departments ahead of time, so they can take on extra staff or whatever it is they need to do to take advantage of the good result when it works through to them.

What I have set out here is the crudest possible outline of how this system works, but if anyone in the Radical Statistics Group would be interested in applying this method, I would be very happy to discuss it with them.

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