

Radical Statistics

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Annual General Meeting

The meeting was held at Gregory House, Saturday 21st February from 11.00 until 17.00. The Convenor began by highlighting the following issues: what are our objectives, what should the consequent methods be, and with whom are we seeking to communicate.

Jonathan Rosenhead recognised our identity crisis as something experienced before in various groups, such as BSSRS and the radical OR group. Each had begun as a response to an issue; viz., biological and chemical warfare (BCW) and "professionalisation" of the O.R. Society respectively. He outlined the content of one or two successive BSSRS policy statements. This was contrasted with the position of the "Science for the People" Group (U.S.) - which is that they will be defined by their actions, and not by a policy statement. It was suggested that some issues would lead to the creation of dissent, internally and externally to the Group, and that we must not be afraid of resignations.

Discussion ensued on the need for, and possible content of, a policy statement. It was pointed out that many of us are already involved in other groups, from whose practice we can draw lessons which could form the basis of an RS policy statement (even though RS, as a group, has as yet little experience). Other suggestions were for a journal of general interest to those involved in or sympathetic to the group, a series of pamphlets on specific industrial, educational, etc., problems (probably produced by subgroups), and press releases as required. Also discussed were the problems of the limitations of statistical "expertise" the possibility of objectivity of statistical work.

The afternoon session began with a discussion in depth of the motion presented in RS5. It was ultimately decided to withdraw it in the form in which it was proposed. Two people will report on the progress of talks between the Civil Service and the unions (about permitting civil servants' political activity) for a further Newsletter.

Reports from the subgroups:

- (i) Education - in the final stages of preparing a critique of the Educational Priority Areas evaluation;
- (ii) Teaching/Methodology - had held a series of discussions of two main clusters of issues: (a) the teaching of social statistics in various contexts, including the problem of assessment; and (b) critical methodologies, e.g. Bayesianism;
- (iii) Economics - preparing an article on the Retail Price Index and proposing discussions on public debt policies;

- (iv) Health - the current convenor is seeking a replacement;
and
- (v) Statistics in Schools - newly formed.

It was suggested that first drafts of productions by the various subgroups should be published in the Newsletter; and also that a seminar might be scheduled in order to more constructively discuss a particular issue.

Discussion ensued on whether we should have a membership subscription or newsletter subscription(s), or a fund replenished by donations (as at present; current balance reported by the Treasurer as £36). It was decided that the Next Newsletter should contain a slip saying "I wish to continue receiving the Newsletter and enclose a donation of ..." for the reader to return. The question of a subscription will be reviewed after a policy statement has been formulated. Transcripts of the September Conference will be available as a separate publication from Paul Chalmers - Dixon for 30p

A "caretaker" committee of five people was nominated for no more than 6 months, and specifically to produce the first draft of a policy statement for the next Newsletter. Meetings can then be held to discuss the draft fully. (see announcement in this Newsletter).

On publications, besides the Newsletter and pamphlets/booklets produced by subgroups, it was suggested that certain existing communication channels are useful because they make information available quickly. The issue was raised of whether we need a purely "internal" publication.

The Campaign against the Cuts was discussed. A coordinating group to liaise with the relevant subgroups was set up. (Contact Nic Wright 01-633-7532, during the day).