

RSS Meeting on Income Distribution

Several Radstats members were at the February meeting of the Social Statistics and Survey Methodology sub-group on the distribution of income. I felt the meeting raised several points some of which the group ought perhaps to consider in more detail. The most striking (and ironio) feature was listening to two Government Statisticians repeatedly say that the discussion of income distribution was limited by the lack of suitable statistics. Clearly no blame can be attached to the statisticians for this but what was not said was that the main reason for this must surely be a lack of political will to produce them. We also heard how the Inland Revenue would not co-operate with OPCS with a view to improving matters. How reasonable is the position of the Inland Revenue? Is the privacy issue being manipulated to prevent vital data from being collected?

As far as the organisation of the meeting was concerned, I felt it was unreasonable that the only invited discussant should be another Government statistician. Surely a more balanced view of the situation would have been obtained, if for example, one of our group with some specialist knowledge and, presumably, criticisms was given the chance to reply. These opportunities will not fall into our laps. We need to find ways and means of grasping them. The RSS is, after all, the major forum for discussing statistical issues.

Ian Plewis

REPORT OF THE RADICAL STATISTICS HEALTH SUB-GROUP

A meeting took place on April 7th of people interested in resuscitating the dormant Health Sub-group. It was decided to propose some definite ideas for projects in order to provide a focus for discussion and, where appropriate, action.

It was suggested that we should study the recently issued consultative document on 'Priorities for Health and Personal Social Services in England' to see where and how statistical arguments had been used to justify political points (or where inconvenient arguments had been omitted). We should then point these out to those who were being consulted. Another suggestion was that we should consider joining forces with some other more established group to do this. It was suggested that we contact the Socialist Medical Association.

Klim Macpherson suggested that we did a critique of the politics of clinical trials to see how this related to the statistics of trials; the question of screening could perhaps be included in this.

In general it was felt to be important to make contact with other groups with similar interests but who had got further in pursuing them. In particular it was decided to contact the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science which has an active industrial health hazards group and who were looking for people to collaborate with groups of workers who wanted to survey possible symptoms resulting from hazards in their workplaces. This would be more likely to involve individual members of our group in their own locality but if it got under way the group could provide a focus for sharing experience.

Ian Plewis said that he was no longer willing to act as convenor of this group and I was persuaded against my better judgement to take his place - if anyone feels that this was an undemocratic decision and would like to propose someone else please don't hesitate to do so. There was a request that a copy of the health group mailing list be sent to everyone on it, and I will do this after Easter

As quite a number of the people on the list, and not just people from London, are in the habit of attending Royal Statistical Society meetings it was decided to try to hold sub-group meetings after these. Because of the subject of the next Medical Section meeting (Defence medicine) it was decided to meet after the meeting on 'Measuring Social Class', on May 18th. The present arrangement is to gather in the bar of the London School of Hygiene from 5.30 and start our meeting at 6.00. (Further details when I circulate the mailing list - the School bar is usually very quiet in the evening but I will find a room we can use in the case of any unusual manifestations of life by other customers. Please also note that the bar has a club license so, in theory, outsiders need to be signed in)

A member of the bssrs Industrial Health Hazards group** will come to this meeting to tell us about their activities and plans.

Meanwhile we need to hold a meeting fairly soon to discuss the consultative document 'Priorities for Health and Social Services in England' (DHSS, published by HMSO, price £ 1.60) together with a further document 'Prevention and Health: everybody's business' (same source 50p). As comment on the first one has been asked for fairly soon and as the holiday season will soon be on us this meeting will follow the RSS Medical section meeting on May 25th and will be in the London School of Hygiene bar (escape clause as before) at 6.30 pm. As the DHSS seems to be churning out documents at a great rate there may well be some more by May 25th. If so bring them along as well!

If anyone who can't get along to either of these meetings has comments, suggestions, criticisms etc. please get in touch with me before then. I am told that I am difficult to contact by phone so you will probably have to cultivate the ancient art of letter writing to:

Alison Macfarlane
40 Warwick Road
St. Albans
Herts AL1 4OL
Tel: St. Albans 52112

**They are meeting the previous Saturday (May 15th) to discuss their future plans and have asked for a few members of the health group could go to this. Their meeting is described as a 'Training Session' and will be held at the Safety and Hygiene Dept., Aston University starting at 11am and continuing until about 5pm. If you want to go please contact Bo Clayton, 46 Prospect Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 Tel: 021-449 2154.