

HENRY WYNNE'S THE VOTE

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In the first-ever contested election for President of the RSS the Council's nominee Sir Campbell Adamson was overwhelmingly defeated by Henry Wynn, a lecturer from I.C. In a ballot of the fellowship Henry Wynn got 933 votes and Campbell Adamson 614. Those members of Council who pursued the controversial nomination on the grounds that the previous vote (in which Sir Campbell Adamson failed to get elected to Council) was unrepresentative of the views of the Fellowship exhibited little faith either in the methods of statistics or in the concern of the fellowship about who should head their society.

So having been elected to the Presidency, Henry Wynn is in the unenviable position of trying to move the Society, and Council in particular, towards a more open and democratic way of conducting its own affairs and encouraging it to take up public issues involving the use of statistics.

His first attempt to tackle the issue of nominations for Council and the Presidency met with resistance at the Council. Although technically every council is elected, there is considerable feeling that contested elections should be avoided and that council rather than being a House of Commons should be more like the Privy Council. In general the Council is felt to be better qualified than fellows to judge who would make a suitable Council member. Dilution or an unworkable composition might result if control of nominations passed out of the Council's hands. Henry has proposed setting up a broadly based nominating committee. This would involve a wider section of the Society in the selection process, and preserve the possibility of balancing the nominations so as to achieve a representative Council. The proposal was not sympathetically received by the majority of Council, which is digging its heels in against any further change. It looks as if an opening up of the nominations will only be achieved with continued pressure from the fellowship.

The other proposals put forward were for a more detailed report of Council business in News and Notes (which was agreed) and for the opening of Council meetings to the fellowship, rejected as being likely only to cause difficulties in the arrangement of Council business! The final defence of the 'no more of this democratic nonsense' group is that, obviously, no change should be introduced until a long-delayed Opinion Survey is carried out on 'what the fellowship thinks'. Have we been here before?

Council has been dipping its' toes into the water of political controversy where statistical evidence or the professional concerns of statisticians are involved. On the whole the Council is in favour of this kind of activity, but present arrangements for doing it are extremely adhoc and the fellowship rarely has the opportunity to discuss the reports which are submitted on their behalf to outside bodies. Invitations to contribute ideas to the groups drawing up these reports are likely to increase...

Council also took a decision-in-principle last year to hold open meetings, of a debate and discussion form, on topical issues. So far none has been held, but there is a meeting proposed on Road Traffic Forecasts in the next session which relates to the issue of public access to government statistical information. As one of the points 'Rad.Stats' policy statement is to press for free access to this kind of information we can use this opportunity to make sure the issue is raised and discussed. Allied to this is the question of Official Secrets and tentative moves being made by the Government to reduce the restrictions on civil servants. The RSS would hardly be far in the vanguard if it adopted a public position on this; with a little help from Rad. Stats?

Although Henry Wynn is not a member of Rad. Stats. he will need the help and support of Rad. Stat members of RSS in attempting to change the ways the RSS works. Whether these attempts will succeed against such heavy inertia is another question.