

TOWARDS STRUCTURE

I find that the predictable in human affairs is disappointing. And the predictable, it seems to me, often occurs when people set up an organisation. The process from an informal grouping of people, with ideas and aims in common, seems inevitably to go through stages of making policy, constructing rules, establishing a hierarchy, finding accommodation, employing staff and so on. This evolution to structure is understandable; there is the need for stability and permanence and perhaps it is felt that only in a structured organisation is it possible to maintain control. I believe that it is at the informal stage in which innovation and activity are strongest and I wonder whether it is possible to avoid the growth (or degeneracy!) to to structure and hence maintain freshness.

The Radical Statistics Group is a relatively informal organisation but a trend to structure has started. For evidence of this I go back to the fifth newsletter (RS5). An article by George Hay is accepted but there are qualms about it. The editorial collective felt it necessary to preface the article by a special editorial note. A letter to George Hay is also printed which states, "As you may be aware . . . the RSG Newsletter exists as an open forum for members' ideas around certain accepted issues. This means that there are certain accepted criteria for inclusion of work within the Newsletter, the major point being that it should in some way be of a radical nature." (My underlining.) In the editorial note it is stated, "One purpose which we felt might be served by publishing these items [George Hay's article and the letter to him] was that of . . . helping in the definition of the Radical Statistics Group itself." (My underlining.) In the main editorial we have, ". . . this article was felt to be so politically contentious as to raise the question of non-inclusion." So here is a search for definition: a need to circumscribe the ideas which can come under the heading of the Radical Statistics Group. And this tugs against an obvious desire to be open to fresh ideas, hence the hazy demarcation phrases such as "certain accepted issues". And what ruffled the feathers of the collective? George Hay's article advocated a form of work study. It is not surprising that in RS6 the policy theme is developed.

A report of an Annual General Meeting appears in RS6 in which it is stated:

"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."

The report continues, "Discussion ensued on the need for, and possibly content of, a policy statement". (The die was cast, policy statement and not definition by action.) A subcommittee of five was set up to draft a policy statement. This committee did its work, for a policy statement does appear in the same issue (and a revised version in RS7). But flexibility with caution is still around for in RS6 the editorial opens with, "This issue . . . has been edited with the now traditional permissiveness - everything received went in." (Note that permissiveness means that someone has the power to permit.) It was not long before we had rules in order to obtain a bank account (RS10). In RS11 the need for further definition is seen in the editorial where the difficulty of obtaining articles is put down, partly, to a lack of, "clear editorial policy." In the report of the last AGM (see this newsletter) it seems that the ghost of innocuous George Hay is still around for, "Any articles editors of the newsletter were dubious about should be referred to the committee."

Will the Radical Statistics Group continue on its path to structure or come to some uneasy equilibrium with flexibility or be a "society defined by its actions" or just die? Well of course the group must die at some time or other. But this should not worry us, for the Radical Statistics Group exists in the activities of sub-groups and these can survive autonomously. Even now the Health Group describes itself, in its booklets, as the Radical Statistics Health Group and not, for example, as the Health Section of the Radical Statistics Group. If the RSG does become more structured I do not think that more active support will be guaranteed. The Institute of Statisticians, for example, has failed for years in obtaining a profusion of articles for its Newsletter and periodically moans at the lack of support for its courses and meetings - notably its AGMs. In fact I suspect that the IOS has proportionately fewer active members than the RSG. Further, the structured organisation, which I have said is partly a response to a need for permanence, does not cease to worry over its survival. Last year the IOS went into paroxysms over the possible introduction of a new grade of member. This new grade was proposed in part to obtain revenue for survival. But some members thought that a new grade would lower the status of the IOS and by implication, I suppose, destroy it as effectively as lack of funds.

If we believe in a libertarian society then surely we should try to live in a libertarian way and our organisational constructions should be libertarian.

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