

## RADICAL STATISTICS GROUP

### ACTION ON STATISTICS

There are many times when statistical issues crop up in the media, or where a radical intervention could help to bring such issues into the political arena. Recent examples include the Tax and Price Index; the use of criminal statistics in election advertisements; industrialists' use of opinion polls of workers; monetarist policies and inflation accounting; race in the census. Probably there are many more such issues up-and-coming. Carefully worded and placed letters and press releases could both address the particular matter of substance and raise more general questions about the production and use of statistics - thus an intervention around the Tax and Price Index could have gone into the lack of representation of the conditions of the poor in conventional cost of living measures, into the various budgetary measures taken around these, etc.

Most of the recent cases have received little radical input - the BSSRS/Radstats initiative on the census race question is the exception, though individual members have also come in on IQ testing recently. These are welcome, and we would like to see more of the same! It is clearly a problem for any individual to write as Radstats, and it's often easier to assume that someone else will write a letter, so why bother? And press releases require organisation....

Radstats wants to encourage radical intervention on statistical issues, and the Troika<sup>2</sup> meeting of 8 May has decided on a structure that may help this. The idea is that if you are aware of an issue where Radstats could make a quick, useful statement, or where someone should do so, then contact one of the people listed below.

What we'll do is to attempt to get the basic materials involved and work out who would be in the best position to put out a statement, or write a letter. A minimum of two of this group of four will have to approve the statement if it is to have Radstats' name on it. All four of the group, if available, will discuss the matter.

The aim is to raise awareness of political questions concealed in current statistical usage, particularly in the mass media, and to provide an input of critical analysis. If we can get this established, it's likely that we'll end up being approached for comments as issues arise. We may even be contacted by community groups etc., for statistical commentary and assistance....the fire-brigade may yet emerge!

So get those nagging statistical concerns moving, and you may yet find Radical Statistics Group on the front page. Which could increase membership too!

When you feel that it would be worth commenting, that someone should say something, or that you'd like to say it better, contact one of:

Heather Booth	021-327-0194 ext 11 work
Jeff Evans	01-348-5514 home
John Lintott	01-226-3208 home
Ian Miles	0273-601369 home

(breathless prose by Ian Miles)

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### GOOD IDEAS, PART TWO

A suggestion arising in the Radstats Troika<sup>2</sup> meeting on 8 May was warmly welcomed. However, there was a sudden wave of eye-rolling when the question of who might do some work on it was raised. It seems that most of us have lists of commitments so long that all of our surplus energy will be spent in pruning these, rather than taking on any more.

Still it was a good idea, and here it is:

#### What about doing a handbook on using statistics for activists?

This could take two forms. The first would require more work and experience, and would be a comprehensive discussion of all the issues! The second would be much easier, but still requires some editing and writing. This would mean setting up a collection of maybe half-a-dozen papers, presented accessibly as a large pamphlet or small book.

The issues to be addressed:

- where to get statistics (along the lines of Bill Ridgers' article in Demystifying Social Statistics)
- how to criticise various typical mystifying uses of statistics in politics and policy-making....forecasts, cost-benefit, etc.
- how these criticisms can be used to advantage by the Left in various situations - public enquiries, in the media, in legal processes, etc.

Chapters could be founded on experience of, say, motorway or aircraft enquiries, community activism, consumer groups, etc. They should draw out the lessons for practice!

#### Who is interested in this worthwhile project?

Whoever you are, contact the Troika!