

Editor's page

In this newsletter the debate about whether cuts in government statistics should be opposed is continued with John Lintott's response to Cathie Marsh's letter in the last newsletter which was in turn prompted by John's editorial in the newsletter previous to that. Please can we have some more views on this issue in the next newsletter?

Personally, I don't see any contradiction between being a "radical statistician" and defending jobs, particularly at a time when this government's policies of cuts in health services, education, industry etc. are not based on any sort of statistical information, but only upon the motive of destruction.

Following on from this, I'd like to mention cuts in higher education and research, another area where many of us work. To go over figures that you're probably familiar with, the universities face the loss of one in five jobs by 1983 and the loss of at least 20,000 student places. This comes at a time when the number of 18 year-olds is higher than it ever was in the 70's. The AUI recently estimated that 44,000 young people would be turned away from universities in 1983-4 if the increasing tendency amongst young people to take up higher education is taken into account.

It is not the case that the older traditional universities have been spared. For example, Cambridge University which is among the least badly affected is reported in the press as facing a 3.7% cut. However if one looks at the figures more closely taking into account likely increases in prices, the proposed cut over the next 3 years turns out to be in the region of 16%.

Taking the worst hit universities (eg. Aston, Galford) they are the technological universities and the ones most successful in terms of having high proportions of their graduates finding jobs immediately.

What are the universities doing in response? The formation of the Education Alliance and the setting up of joint campus trade unions composed of students and staff from lecturers to porters is encouraging.

However, in some universities lecturers are proposing early retirement and voluntary redundancy schemes etc. in the hope of avoiding "compulsory redundancies". They appear to have the belief that if they can sit out this round of cuts, in the next couple of years there will be an upturn in the economy. Surely if there is to be an upturn, this requires more educated people and more research, not less?

The issue is not just one of defending jobs but of defending educational opportunities for young people. The campaign to save universities is a first step towards making higher education more widely available.