

## RSS AND INSTITUTE AMALGAMATION

From: John Bibby

To: Dave Drew, Jeff Evans, Irene Stratton, Ian Flewis, Russell Ecob, Colin Russell,  
Ben Armstrong, John Lintott, Heather Weir, Jenny Head, Ian Miles and many others.

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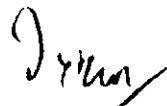
Re: RSS/IDS Amalgamation

The Radstats AGM allowed little time for the discussion of this important issue. However the discussions continued at the RSS Conference in York, including an Open Discussion Meeting. It soon became clear that the concerns felt by Radstats members, especially concerning graded membership, are shared by a wide body of opinion in the RSS.

I therefore feel it would be counterproductive for Radstats to take up the issue now as a group. We are in a situation which somewhat resembles the Campbell Adamson period in 1977. Council may have seriously underestimated the strength of feeling of the membership. Indeed, I personally feel that the main danger now is that the proposals will be thrown out hook, line and sinker, without retaining the good aspects which I would like to preserve. In short, I favour amalgamation, but not amalgamation at any cost.

I would appreciate hearing your comments on this and unless I get booted out of court I will ask Dave Drew to include this letter or something similar in the Newsletter.

Best wishes,



John Bibby

Radical Philosophy 27 (Spring 1981, 52 pp., 75 p.)

This issue of the philosophical counterpart to RSN carries an article by John Burnheim, Statistical Democracy: an Alternative to Democratic Centralism and Communalism. This sets out to sketch a possible polity for after the revolution, which should be of particular interest to radical statisticians, who would most likely be called upon to operate it.

There have always been two major difficulties for those seeking a fairer, better and more just social order: to describe how it would operate (so that it sounds not only more attractive, but also as though it would work), and how to get from here to there. The more different visions of the new social order multiply, the less is any pre-revolutionary consensus achieved on what the new one should be like (and therefore, the less likely is any particular vision to be attained). The attraction of Burnheim's proposal is that it can be introduced piecemeal into the present system, so that at least its feasibility can be ascertained:

At present the jury system is the only element of statistical democracy we have. If others could be squeezed into the interstices of the present system here and there in apparently innocuous ways, it might change people's perceptions of the possibilities of revolutionary change.

Burnheim's idea is that decision-making representatives on the various boards, cooperatives, agencies and tribunals needed for a complex post-capitalist society should not be elected, but should be chosen statistically. That is, by a procedure which gives rise to a statistically representative sample of the people affected by the decisions of the representatives. This would have several advantages: many more people would be involved in decision-taking (as opposed to electing decision-takers), there would be a reduction in career politicians and apparatchiks, the constituency for any decision-taking body could be flexibly and finely adjusted to the range of that body's decisions.

At the same time, there are clearly great difficulties inherent in the scheme. Burnheim's recognition of these is limited to the less-than-reassuring observation

Statistical democracy is not without its problems. I invite the reader to speculate about them and possible solutions to them.

Two problems, in particular, stand out. One is that a great deal of power is in effect being entrusted to a technological elite of statisticians and computer operators. Allied to this, it is not clear that present political wrangling is being more than shifted into a different area, that of who decides on the constituency boundaries for any body. For example, were a body set up to decide about the building of an airport, or a power station, it would be a critical initial decision to choose the population from which the representative sample should be drawn.

Still, there is a perverse attraction about a proposal to utilise the most sophisticated products of capitalism for running a socialist free enterprise economy. And any exercise in thinking through how the post-revolutionary society would actually operate cannot but be helpful.