

PERHAPS AN EDITORIAL:

## Unemployment Statistics and Unemployment

(This is an example of how to write an article for the Newsletter you are editing without taking editorial advantage of your readers: put it in the editorial. For the usual editorial material about Radstats and this issue, please skip a couple of pages)

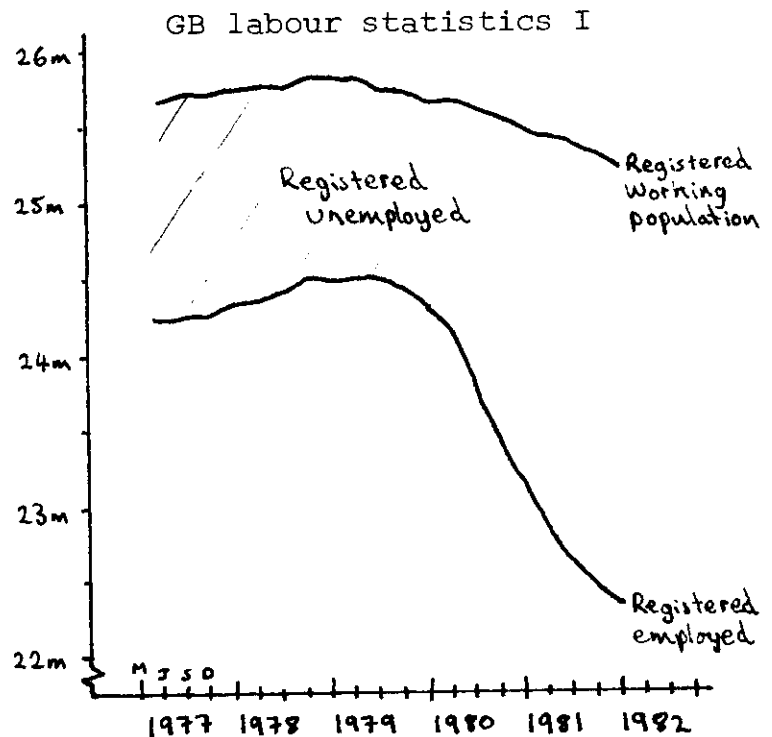
It has often been said that "statistics seldom surprise". Since the vast majority of officially collected statistics - and that is the vast majority of statistics collected - are designed to monitor existing government programmes, they are unlikely to uncover social problems that are not being tackled.

But occasionally the inadequacy of official programmes is highlighted by the glaring inadequacy of the figures that they produce. Unemployment relief is a case in point.

In the three years since March 1979 the number of people in employment has dropped by 2.1 million.

Other things being equal, one would expect a corresponding increase in unemployment. However, other things are not equal, and registered unemployment has risen by 'only' 1.6 million in the same three years. Some 500,000 workers have disappeared from the working population.

At times of a steady economy, a drop in the size of the working population would represent less people who are able and willing to work. Now it represents an increase in the number of workers denied activity.



Source: Employment Gazette, seasonally adjusted figures.

The majority of the missing 500,000 are so-called "discouraged workers", people who are not entitled to benefits, who may have given up hope of finding a job and who are no longer recognised by unemployment statistics. A minority of the 500,000 represent an increase in Youth Opportunities and other temporary schemes for the unemployed whose recipients are counted in neither the employed nor the unemployed statistics.

According to Department of Employment figures, there are more women than men among the 500,000 who have dropped out of the 'working population', some 200,000 men and 300,000 women. The "discouraged workers" would be better called "denied workers".

Like the 3 million counted unemployed, denied workers represent unbuilt houses and schools, unrepaired roads and estates, unmined coal, unmade clothes, and uneducated children.

But increasingly the unemployed, both counted and uncounted, are seen as unemployable: many a shortsighted politician can only imagine that Britain has reached the limits of its capacity! (no longer will workers be needed, we are apparently so advanced that there is no more work to be done) and they eagerly welcome this situation somehow translating rotten housing and destitute communities into nirvana.

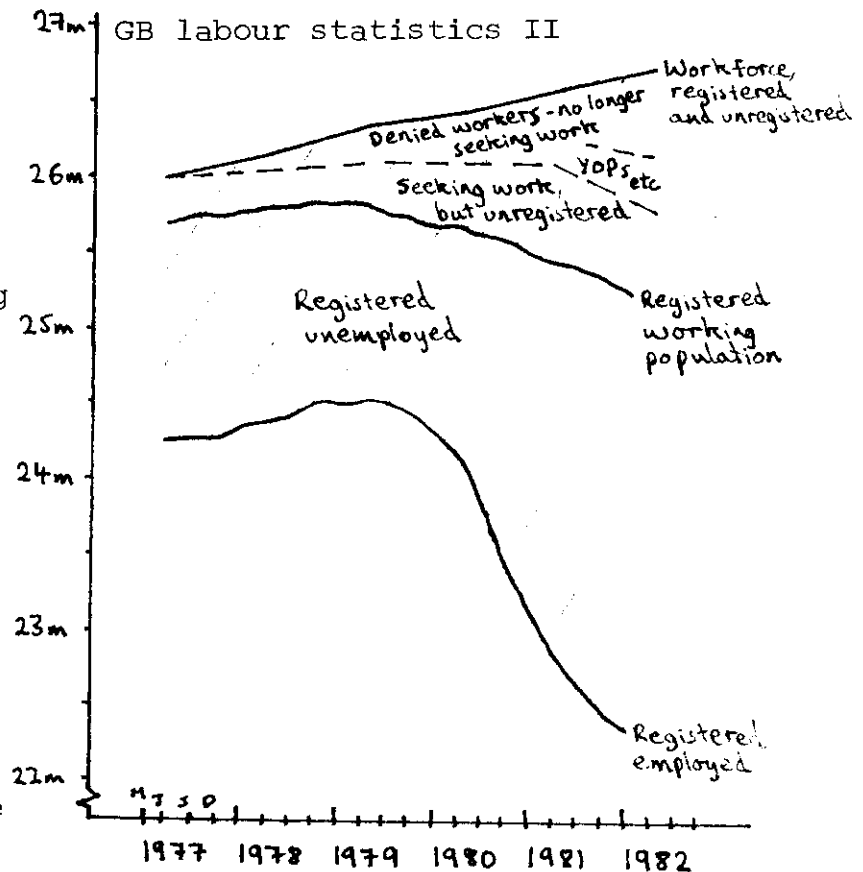
So unemployment becomes "Further reductions in the average working week" (!! Conservative election manifesto, Bradford, 1982). Or, we have "an increasingly non-work situation", in which "we must train young people for uncertainty in employment" (many a Labour administration). Social progress is forgotten along with the idle hands that could produce it. The 'political' is taken out of Britain's political economy.

Back to those numbers. 500,000 is a poor underestimate of the uncounted unemployed. 500,000 reflects the drop since 1979 in the officially recognised working population, but even in 1979 there were many workers who were 'hidden unemployed' - seeking work but not registered as unemployed in the official statistics. An estimate of these for Great Britain comes from the General Household Survey. In addition, the number of people of working age has risen steadily over the past five years, and so the drop in the working population must be measured against an expected increase rather than a steady total.

It is simple to calculate the expected increases in the working population year by year from OPCS population estimates: one assumes that the activity rate (the proportion of the population over 15 that is working or seeking work) would have remained constant but for the recession. I assumed the 1977 level of .628 from the General Household Survey ( a survey worth fighting for).

The number of unemployed in Great Britain at March 1982 is then 4.3 million, only 67% of which was registered unemployment.

The two graphs show Great Britain's figures because the General Household Survey refers to Great Britain. However, the unemployment statistics



Source: Empl. Gaz., OPCS population estimates & projections, General Household Survey.

most usually publicised are those for the UK. Assuming GB activity rates for the UK, the figures become:

UK. March '82.

Total workforce = Population over 15 x 1977 activity rate	= 27.409 million
Employed	= 22.881 million
Total unemployed (subtracting)	= 4.528 million
Registered unemployed	= 2.981 million

i.e. 66% of the total unemployed are registered.  
This is a decrease from 77% in 1977.

These figures are not new - parts of the calculations have appeared in newspapers and in the Employment Gazette. The TUC produce their own estimate of the real number of unemployed, that includes those seeking work but not registered, those on special schemes such as YOPS, and an additional adjustment for those on short-time working (which is not included in my calculations but currently accounts for the equivalent of about 25,000 full-time jobs lost). The TUC's estimate of unemployment for the UK at mid-1982 was 4.1 million, and is intentionally conservative by not including any of the denied workforce.

Before leaving unemployment, it is worth considering that flow statistics may be as illuminating as statistics of the stock of unemployment: 1 in 4 of the (official) working population was registered as unemployed at some time during the last year.

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#### Radstats and this issue

Radstatters are well-placed to make sure that collected figures do not obscure social circumstances. Where inadequate social and economic policy produces inadequate statistics it is often possible to point out the gaps and sometimes to fill them. Pamphlets like 'the Unofficial Guide to Official Health Statistics', 'Rawp Deals', and the 'Nuclear Numbers Game' seem to me to help on these lines.

Other pages of this issue of RSN refresh parts that official statistics don't reach (or expose a part that official statistics keep covered). Talking of refreshing and exposing, the Anti/Alternative Social Trends idea and material is still there - it just lacks a group or person to take the driving seat.

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There are many adjustments that could make the calculations and the graph on the previous page more accurate, but these adjustments would be marginal to the main argument of an increasing number of denied workers. Some workers on temporary special measures schemes such as YOPS are not included in my 'total unemployed' because they are included as part of the registered employed. In addition short-time working accounts for the equivalent of about 25,000 full-time jobs lost. On the other hand, the number of self-employed may have been under-estimated by the DoE who are revising their own figures of the 'registered employed' at present.

Those (few) who have been bought out of the workforce by early retirement schemes are included among the denied workers. Some employment is not recorded - the black economy - but it mostly involves extra work for those already registered as employed, such as avoidance of VAT. So the number of registered employed is a fair estimate of total employment.  
None of the figures distinguish full-time work from part-time work.

Demystifying statistics won't be helped if the pro's turn inwards for protection of their work and 'their' standards. In this RSN, Radstats joins the debate on professionalisation quietly coursing amid merger-talk in the Royal Statistical Society and the Institute of Statisticians.

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This Newsletter is due to be the last one run off by John Bibby. Please note the call for help with ne letter production. While we are on contributions, would anyone like to construct an index for the first quarter-century of Radstats Newsletters for publication in some future issue?

Ludi Simpson

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## Race and Crime Statistics : Book Review

Race and Crime Statistics, by Susan Smith. Race Relations Fieldwork Background Paper No 4. August 1982. From: Race, Pluralism and Community Group, RSR, Church House, Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3NZ. 35p plus 15p&p.

This twenty page booklet discusses the issues surrounding the use of 'race' to categorise crime statistics. It was prompted by the press release issued by Scotland Yard on 10 March 1982, which contained for the first time data on 'victim perception of appearance of assailant'. The booklet looks at these data, discussing them in the light of other evidence and the context in which they were released.

The booklet begins with a brief discussion of the sources of statistics on crime in general, noting that only the Metropolitan Police explicitly use race to categorise arrests and more recently convictions. Colour of assailant has also been asked of victims of violent crime since 1975. The reliability of these sources is then discussed: the under-reporting of crime; the fact that not all crimes reported are solved; and the selectivity involved in proceeding from arrests to charges to convictions. Any attempt to make a racial comparison adds to these problems considerably, and the author notes that such difficulties 'seem, at every stage, to discourage the use of race-coded data'.

Under the heading 'the problem of meaning', Susan Smith goes on to mention that official crime statistics reflect more the bureaucracy of policing than the incidence of crime, and are biased, according to some, by the institutionalised racism of the judicial system. Because of this, the importance of official statistics 'as a means of detecting an imbalance in the dispensation of justice virtually demands that they are collected'. What seems to have been ignored here is the fact that these same data are widely used as if they accurately measured the incidence of crime in a community: these data go by the name of crime statistics, not justice statistics. But do the official statistics detect imbalances in the dispensation of justice? Probation data (used in the booklet as an example) may show a disparity in the treatment meted out to blacks and whites, but how do official statistics show unequal arrests, unequal charges and unequal convictions? How do they distinguish between any real differences according to race and judicial bias? Do we not need to know the 'truth' to measure these statistics against, a truth which the statistics are meant to measure in the first place?

The next section deals with studies of criminal activity, mainly in terms of crime rates compared to whites. The Irish were singled out in one study, but the evidence appears to be inconclusive. Asians enjoy lower crime rates than whites, and this fact is left to speak for itself. It is West Indians who are over-represented in the data on certain forms of crime, even after adjusting for age and social status. The author notes that this is not entirely attributable to racial bias in arrests, but does not consider probable biases after arrest - at charging and conviction - despite having acknowledged such possibilities earlier. Instead, she draws the uneasy conclusion that 'it would be a pity if Britain's law and order campaign were to focus too much on policing at the expense of recognising the disadvantaged structural position of blacks...'

Turning to the press release itself, Susan Smith points to various inaccuracies and exaggerations and to the fact that race is not mentioned at all in the text. However, it does appear in one of the tables concerned with recorded offences of robbery and other violent theft in that it is broken down by victims' perceptions of the colour of their assailant. This table received widespread attention despite the fact that such offences accounted for only 3% of all crime in 1981 and include theft from businesses as well as from individuals (mugging). In trying to understand the significance of the press release, three questions are considered. First, what new useful information the press release provided: none, because Home Office studies have already used Metropolitan Police data to show violent crimes to be disproportionately intra-racial, rather than predominantly committed by blacks against whites. Secondly, what part did the press play in emphasising the one table on race: a large part, both in news items and later feature articles, though their editorials criticised the police for distortion. Thirdly, was there a political motive: yes, to whip up a law and order campaign, which backfired, or yes, in the interests of certain sections of the Metropolitan Police. Either way, we all know who loses.

At 35p, the booklet is well worth a read for the issues it raises and for the list of a dozen or so useful references. For a more statistical and radical(?) approach, however, we must await the Race Group's forthcoming chapter.

Heather Booth

IMPORTANT

# SCIENCE for PEOPLE

Magazine of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science

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PLEASE ENSURE WIDE  
CIRCULATION. POSSIBLE  
TO INCLUDE IN RADSTATS

BULLETIN? PLEASE KEEP US INFORMED OF THE COMPILER OF THE  
BULLETIN.

Dear LUDI,

For some time now it has been apparent that SFP is in a very poor financial position. In the past BSSRS has always met the deficit but now the amount involved is increasing as the costs of production rise. We believe that it is possible for the magazine to be self supporting if the sales can be increased. For ~~exam~~ple if every member of BSSRS and its affiliated groups either introduced one subscriber or sold two or three copies of each issue this would solve most of the problem.

We feel that the magazine has improved recently and is now attractive to would be purchasers; as to its content, -both subject matter and politics-, well we invite articles and letters from readers. SFP can be an important way for groups to make themselves known to a large number of sympathetic people and is always willing to review and advert<sup>is</sup>e pamphlets and meetings of the working groups.

## IN SUMMARY

Encourage members to sell SFP, to friends, at meetings and conferences.

Write to SFP....articles, book reviews, letters, con-science.

Inform SFP of forthcoming events, publications, campaigns.

Meet SFP, send a representative to our (usually) weekly meeting.

Don't allow SFP to simply fade out of existence, act now to ensure it's future.

33½

Tony O'Connell

SFP appears 3-4 times yearly.  
A subscription costs £4, from 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG (5 issues).  
Good bookshops and newsagents will stock it: it is distributed by Publications Distribution Co. op.