

EDITORIAL

Well it's 1984, and (belatedly) welcome to it. Or rather, you're welcome to it. We have a government committed to destroying local democracy and cutting down education, health and social services. We belong to an alliance which is committed to massive rearmament and to constant verbal war against the "evil empire" (except before elections). We have a police force with cameras able to read the number plate of every car passing along the M1 and check them immediately against computer records. We have a press which is ever more subservient to the government line, selling itself with bingo and sex. And we have four million prole unpersons. Who said "Nineteen Eightyfour" wasn't about 1984?

What a cheering prospect! But it's a good time to consider the role of Radical Statistics in all this, and two very differing points of view on radicalism and statistics are put forward here by Ray Thomas and Nic Wright. Radstats is in a healthy state, as shown by the range of topics covered in this issue, but we are short of new, younger, members, and so the draft publicity leaflet written by Ian Miles is very timely. Lots of comments and suggestions please!

This issue contains two articles on the probability of nuclear disasters. The first, by Terry Speed, shows up dramatically the CEGB's inadequate approach to assessing the risk of catastrophe in planning the new Sizewell reactor. If the rest of their planning is as bad as their statistics? In the second, Stephen Shenfield writes about a much less easily quantifiable probability, that of nuclear war.

We also have an article by the education group on the current controversy about the effects of resources and selection on school performance. But, possibly more seriously, this article also discusses the role of the government and the press in allowing open debate of educational research on its merits, rather than on its adherence to the party line.

And so we're back to the state in 1984. There's plenty to arouse interest in this issue, and hopefully to stimulate debate, activity, and perhaps more discussion in future issues.

Steve Bennett.

SITUATIONS OCCASIONALLY VACANT

We get the occasional request for someone to do the odd bit of teaching, to give a talk/lecture etc.. If you are unemployed or need some more work and would like to be contacted if such a request is made, please write in to R.S.G., c/o 9 Poland Street, London W1 with brief details of your areas of interest etc..

The Political Economy of Demographic Change: Causes and Implications of Population Trends in Great Britain.

By JOHN F ERMISCH. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

Readers of this book will quickly realise that its title is a misnomer: for 'political economy' read 'economics'! The book is devoid of political analysis of trends in the various demographic factors considered, concentrating instead entirely on economic factors such as wage levels and the demand and supply of labour, services etc.

Being the main determinant of Britain's current population structure, the book concentrates on fertility. Ermisch's basic argument is that income largely determines fertility change. In one (ie male) earner families, increased income leads to increased family size because the income effect is greater than the cost of the extra child. For two earner families, an increase in income either has no effect on fertility, or decreases it. Thus when few women worked and men's wages were rising (pre-1960s), fertility increased. Later on, when more women were gainfully employed and both women's and men's wages were rising, fertility fell. At the same time, women's gainful employment led to later ages at first birth.

This argument deals only with the immediate economic relationship between labour and fertility and fails to look for underlying factors. Indeed other factors which might influence fertility and women's employment outside of the home are quickly dismissed. Among these is the women's movement, with which Ermisch is so unfamiliar as to feel the need to put these two words in quotes. In one and a half pages he notes that women have remained in the same occupations, concluding that women do not aspire to better occupations sufficiently to explain their fertility decline. Nor do attitudinal changes significantly effect fertility. Ermisch's treatment of the role of women in both the family and the labour market is to accept the status quo without question. He does not consider why women are in the worst paid jobs with little 'career structure'. He does not question why they should go out to work in greater numbers than ever before, even though there are so few opportunities open to them. Without such an analysis he cannot explain why desired family size and fertility have fallen, and indeed he makes no attempt to explain why women should want to have fewer children. Perhaps ironically, he repeatedly refers to women's commitment to work...personal commitment or committed by circumstance? For many women, work is a necessity.

The book also looks at the implications of demographic structure on the labour market and on various social factors including housing, education, state pensions, health and social services. Throughout, the emphasis is economic to the exclusion of wider implications, and though policy measures are suggested they do not encompass an alternative or political approach.

Heather Booth