

EDITORIAL/APOLOGY/EXPLANATION

Having only been peripherally involved with the group in the past, when I was asked to edit this issue of the newsletter my first reaction was to go into auto-professional mode and blurt "No sorry...it looks like too much work to me...I'm afraid I haven't the time". The brave and indefatigable Troika person detailed to persuade me, however, replied "Nonsense - all you have to do is sit back and wait for copy to roll in, number the pages and pass it on to Bob Peacock". My defences crumbled and I agreed to take on the task, arming myself with a felt pen and a large envelope. Then I realized there's a great deal to be said for first reactions.

Nothing arrived - I expected my pigeon-hole to be crammed every day with the effusive outpourings of radicals of every shade. As the production deadline approached colleagues started worrying about my perpetual shadowy presence around the pigeon-holes. Then suddenly it happened - first in dribs and drabs and then in more dribs and drabs - contributions! However by then the production date (for unavoidable reasons) had been put back a month - so some late articles could go into this issue too.

Alas, when looking over what I had received I was initially despondent. If previous issues of the newsletter could be used as door-stops, weapons on a picket line, protection against canings by irascible heads of department etc., this issue, I thought, would be overshadowed by a slice of salami. But read on!

What this issue lacks in width it gains in depth, quality and variety. At least I think so. It kicks-off with a report from this year's **AGM** business meeting. In addition to a change in the membership of the Troika, there were important points on recruitment and the newsletter. One these has been taken up already and the inside cover features details of the subgroup and contact addresses. Dave Drew then summarises the discussion that took place at the AGM on the perennially topical issue of **Race and Crime statistics** and there is also an important notice arising from the AGM aimed at **Civil Servants** who wish to keep their membership of Rad Stats quiet. After GCHQ and Sarah Tisdall I can sympathise with their worries.

Next there are three sub-group reports - all of them crying out for more involvement. The **Race Group's** tussles with the Runnymede Trust are over at last - they parted company. This leaves even more work to do to complete the 2nd edition of **Britain's Black Population** - and anyone interested in contributing would be welcome and should contact Heather Booth. The **Health Group** report back on their successful RSS presentation and encourage contributions towards their debunking of myths about the NHS and national health. Similarly the **Education Group** hope to produce something on

educational myths and their debunking and invite interested people to a meeting in September. Overall then, sub-group wise, there is plenty for committed persons to do.

In the features section there is variety and depth. Stephen Shenfield gives a **decision-theoretic analysis of the nuclear pre-emption decision**, showing that a strong conviction of the impossibility of surviving (or wanting to survive) a nuclear war, whoever strikes first, is crucial to the probability of pre-emption. RS28 and RS29 featured decision-theoretic approaches to nuclear arms and war and this article continues this valuable discussion. Next is a contribution from the Health Group summarising the problems and availability of **Third World Health statistics** - ending with the note that complete and accurate statistics are essential to progressive governments to improve the health of their people. This leads into the next feature. Ray Thomas continues from the last issue with a thought provoking article on **whether statistics influence policy** or even **whether statistics should influence policy**. He takes issue with a statement made in the draft leaflet published in RS29 and continues the crucial debate about the place of [radical] statistics in current political/social issues. Nic Wright and Heather Booth discussed this in RS29 too. There seems to be a divergence of opinion here - **do radical statistics contribute to social reform?** Ray Thomas in RS29 said that this kind of belief belongs much more to the 1890's than to the 1980's. As with the criticism of say social workers and doctors, do statisticians come in after the state has done its worst and tinker with the symptoms rather than the causes? Ray Thomas states that "statistics belong so much to the organisational world that we should be chary of statistics being used in policy making". He goes on to make some suggestions to improve the situation. This debate must surely lie at the heart of radical statistical activities and, if nothing else, should provide stimulating debate in future issues of the newsletter. The final feature is in a lighter vein. Heather Booth talks about her **experiences in Paradise** - and the problems thereof. Does paradise need radical statisticians or vice versa? Finally there is a review and a letter.

Overall then [and I did not write such a long, tedious editorial to fill space - I just felt like it], though wafer thin this issue of the newsletter is nutritional and appetising, and should hopefully leave you wanting to consume the next one too, if not to contribute toward it. In days where Home Office ministers can appear on TV and dismiss evidence of maltreatment of immigrants in terms not out of place in colonial times, where police powers spiral, where the state can, without hindrance, take away the rights of its employees etc., etc., it has certainly been a tonic to produce the newsletter. Radical Statistics may or may not influence policy - but it certainly is a small ray of light in an increasingly dismal climate of opinion.

Ashok Bhat.

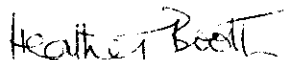
letter

Dear Editor,

I was interested to see that the newsletter seemed to have changed its name as of the last issue. I had always thought that the newsletter was called Radical Statistics, this being followed by the number of the issue, for example Radical Statistics 20. References to RSN were, I thought, an appropriate form of statistical shorthand where N stands for the number of the issue. Rather neat, I thought.

Even if this mild amusement was unintentional, I do hope that it is not to be discontinued.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Booth".

Heather Booth