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PAST AND PRESENT - (Editorial)

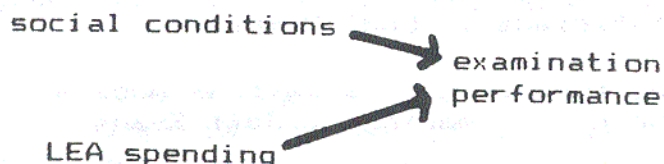
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The Editor's lot is ne'er a happy one! In my naive case, I waited for press-day only to find my in-tray lying bare. A certain amount of pressure judiciously applied nevertheless produced an interesting crop whose quality will, I trust, compensate for whatever the Newsletter might lack in bulk.

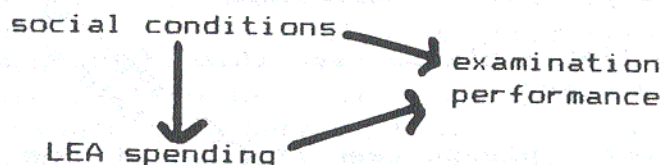
The first article after Subgroup Reports is by Monica Walker, and follows up a piece on race and crime from the last issue. It's good to find the Newsletter being used for debates of this kind - please write to say what you think of the articles in this one!

Ludi Simpson's article should provoke considerable discussion. Not far below the surface of his Responsible Statistics and Responsible Statisticians lies a certain amount of anger, I feel, along with the message that Radstats may be losing sight of its objectives. Ludi refers to the "navel-gazing and armchair philosophising" which all of us indulge in from time to time - or is it more often? Ludi asks what is to be done about this. Or are our problems other than Ludi suggests? Please write to say what you think.

Ian Plewis's Spending and Standards is the "new, improved version" of a recent article in the Times Ed. Supp.. Ian discusses three recent reports which concluded that there is little if any association between educational spending and educational performance (music to Mrs Thatcher's ears!). Needless to say, a fascist lies in the woodpile, and in this case he (or she) is wearing the guise of the dreaded multiple regression analysis. Simplisitic rather than simple, this technique is applied to the model



The conclusion, not surprisingly, is that once social factors have been taken into account, funding has little further effect on examination performance. More surprising perhaps is that the alternative model



was not investigated. This would show, as Ian points out, that "an LEA's exam results can be accurately predicted by its social conditions and that variations in LEA spending are explained by these conditions". (A further, more technical point, is how the ideas of robust regression could be extended to path models such as these, and whether a few outlying observations have undue leverage in determining the estimated coefficients.)

I am reminded on reading Ian's article of work by Byrne and Williamson, published about ten years ago. These authors also examined the impact of educational spending, and countered the argument of 'surplus fat', i.e. that cuts can be implemented without affecting standards. Unfortunately, Byrne and Williamson ran into a lot of flak on technical grounds - in particular the level of aggregation that had been used - and it was doubly unfortunate that the Radstats "Fire Brigade" was not available to retrieve a reputable analysis and thereby give strength to the radical cause.

Jeff Evans has sent two articles, for which I am very grateful. He asks me to point out that the first of these, Outline for a study of the use of models, was prepared some time ago, after a period at The Open University had enabled him to rethink the basis of the Methods and Models course at Middlesex Polytechnic. I know that Jeff would welcome your responses to this article - he sees it as suggestive rather than definitive, and would like to know who else has been thinking along similar lines.

Jeff's second article, The Politics of Numeracy, is based (don't tell anyone!) on part of his draft Ph.D. thesis. It describes some recent surveys which show the extremely unequal distribution of numeracy, that rare and power-bringing commodity (my word, not his!). The commodification of numeracy is what all us radical statistics teachers are about. We re-define and re-package the subject, but can we ever change the nature of the commodity? More pertinently, do we ever de-commodify the subject? This would entail removing it from the (labour) market, until it was either a free good (like air), or a public good valued for value-in-use rather than value-in-exchange.

Numeracy means statistics more than mathematics, and statistics as a commodity is as important a concept as "statistics as a social product". Comparisons with literacy are revealing: these are discussed in Patricia Cohen's A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America (1982, Chicago University Press). This book presents the most fascinating (because historical and therefore empirically based) account of the relationship between statistical consciousness and other social and political variables. Get it for your library!

Bringing up the rear of this Newsletter is a short historical piece by Yours Truly. The history of statistics contains a lot of meat for Radical Statisticians. Our subject developed over the revolutionary period 1780-1830; this was no coincidence. In 1830, London was ringed with burning hayricks; the Labourer's Revolt was put down at a price of 600 deportations and several hangings; 1831 saw the Reform Bill riots; and in 1834 the inaugural meeting of the London (later Royal) Statistical Society took place in the very week that the Tolpuddle Martyrs were sentenced.

A leading Benthamite statistician, Edwin Chadwick, ascribed the revolutionary tempo of the times to "monomania induced by the want of education", and this could explain the infatuation of early statisticians with the need for education - especially in Manchester and the North, where of course the revolutionary potential was that much stronger.

The influence of Benthamites upon early statistics has been commented upon. What is less well known is the personal involvement of Jeremy Bentham, who in 1832 wrote comments on a proposal for a "Statistic Society" in London: this is the subject of my article.

Most as a Stop Press to this issue, comes an article by Macfarlane. And as I haven't seen the article at the time - following the writer, it is certain to be a good and thought-

STOP PRESS - held over until next issue.
Pages 23-32

John Bibby