

## Infant mortality - going up?

### What Margaret Thatcher said

#### Oral Answers

12 JANUARY 1988

**Mrs. Mahon:** How does the Prime Minister explain the fact that, according to official statistics for 1986, this country, alone of all European countries, has seen an increase in infant deaths?

**The Prime Minister:** That is correct, up to the first year. There has been an enormous increase in the number of babies saved immediately at birth and during the first month after birth. We do not know the reason for that particular figure. It may well be that it is a statistical error. If the hon. Lady will look at the report of the Health Service, she will find a fantastic number of improvements in the Health Service that have taken place over this period.

### What the papers said she said

James Naughtie and Peter Hildrew, *The Guardian*, January 13 1988

'At Prime Minister's question time, Mrs Thatcher was forced by Labour MPs to admit that she did not know why infant mortality was increasing, in contrast to the rest of Europe, though she said the rise might be within the statistical margin of error.'

Robin Oakley, *The Times*, January 13 1988

'Mrs Thatcher had her usual battery of statistics ready to counter the Labour assault, but it was the infant mortality figure raised by Mrs Alice Mahon (Halifax) which proved the focus of attention.'

Mrs Thatcher replied that Mrs Mahon was correct, for children in their first year. "We do not know the reason for that particular figure, it may well be that it is within statistical error", she said.

Parliamentary report, *The Times*, January 13 1988

'Miss Alice Mahon (Halifax, Lab) wondered how the Prime Minister explained that, according to the official figures for 1986, Britain alone among all the European countries had seen an increase in the number of infant deaths.'

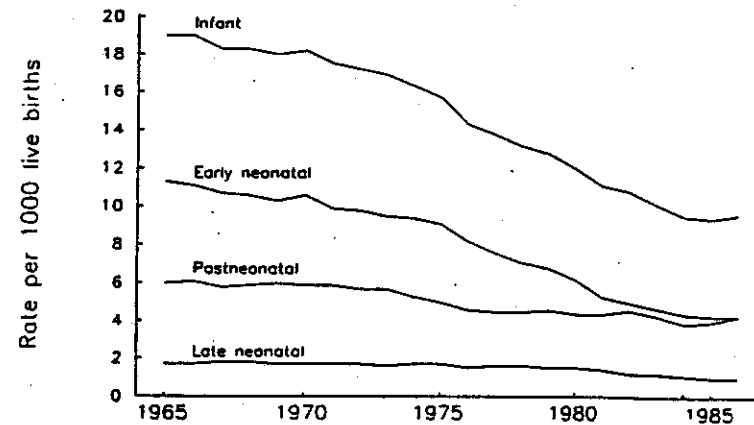
Mrs Thatcher said that that was correct - (Labour interruption) - but there had also been an enormous increase in the number of babies saved at birth or during the first month of life. The reason for the figure referred to was not known, although it could be statistical error.'

Mark Lawson, *The Independent*, January 13 1988

'During her first Question Time as the longest-serving premier of the century, the record-breaking Mrs Thatcher clocked up another first. For a start, she admitted that someone else was right. Infant mortality had increased under this government, claimed Labour's Alice Mahon (Halifax). Mrs Thatcher admitted it. It is sad to report that when, a few moments later, she attributed the increase to a statistical mistake, the record was scrubbed from the books.'

### The data

Deaths in the first year of life, England and Wales, 1966-1986



Source: OPCS Mortality statistics. Series DH3

### EDUCATION GROUP

We produced 1000 copies of 'Figuring Out Education Spending' which have sold steadily since June. We have already covered our costs and there is a good chance that we will eventually sell most of them. However, sales have not been as fast as they were for 'Reading Between the Numbers'; nearly all the 3000 copies of RBTN have now been sold. It is interesting to speculate why this should be. Somewhat ironically, in view of its intended audience, RBTN has appealed to teachers in further and higher education and has been used on a number of courses. FOES is ostensibly a more campaigning pamphlet with perhaps a broader appeal, but so obviously appropriate for courses in education departments. Reaction to FOES has been muted but nobody has argued with our conclusions.

Our one other activity (apart from possible work on Statistics for School Reorganisations - see Steve Simpson's article in RSN39) has been to contribute a talk in the BSSRS series 'Beneath the White Coat'.

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