

*RADICAL*  
STATISTICS  
Newsletter

number 47  
winter 90

*Russell Ged*

## Contents

The **Radical Statistics Group** is a group of individuals based on the distribution of this newsletter. The small amount of central administrative work is done by a committee (this year expanded by co-option of two volunteers), known as "The Troika", and elected at the Annual General Meeting. The editorship of this newsletter rotates; the next editors will be Jacky Holloway and Tina Posner who can be contacted via the address and telephone numbers given below. Apart from producing this newsletter, the work of the RSG is done by its subgroups whose membership is open to all interested parties. Please consult the contact people below if you wish to get involved. Use the newsletter to advertise if you wish to start a new group.

### The Troika

**Christy Maginn**, 12 Spring Close, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 7HA.  
**Cecilio Mar Molinero**, Department of Accounting and Management Science, The University of Southampton, Southampton, SO9 5NH, 0703-592461 (work).  
**Andrew Philpott Morgan**, 20A Dunollie Road, London, NW5 2XP.  
**Steve Ludi Simpson**, 41 Park Crescent, Bradford, BD3 0JZ, 0274-635469 (home).

This newsletter was produced by **Mike Parker**.

**Review Editor: Brendan Burchell**, Social & Political Sciences, Free School Lane, University of Cambridge, CB2 3RQ, 0223-334538 (work).  
**Editors of RSN48: Jacky Holloway** and **Tina Posner**, Open Business School, Open University, Welton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. JANET computer network address: JA\_HOLLOWAY@OPEN.AC.ACSVAX. Telephone Jacky on 0908 655833 (work) or 0908 611095 (home) and Tina on 071 794 0500.

Deadline for copy: **30th. April, 1991.**

### Subgroups

**Health: Alison Macfarlane**, 40 Warwick Rd, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4DL, 0727-52111.  
**Education: Cecilio Mar Molinero**, Department of Accounting and Management Science, The University of Southampton, Southampton, SO9 5NH, 0703-592461.  
**Race and Law: Roy Carr-Hill**, Centre for Health Economics, York University, Heslington, York, YO1 5DD, 0904-433650.  
**Surveys for Pressure Groups: Dave Drew**, Sheffield City Polytechnic, Sheffield, 0742-20911.  
**Trade Unionists: Peter Ramage**, 7 Ipswich Road, Tooting, London, SW17 9RH.

For general correspondence, write to:

Radical Statistics, c/o London Hazards Centre,  
3rd. Floor, Headland House,  
308 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8DS.

2	Editorial	
4	ANNUAL CONFERENCE	
5	Measuring the Poverty Line	<i>David Gordon and Peter Townsend</i>
13	Controversies in the measurements of unemployment: the French experience	<i>Matt Perry</i>
16	Black young people in education and the youth labour market	<i>David Drew</i>
18	Being statistical with the truth	<i>Roy Carr-Hill</i>
21	Are you now, or have you ever been . . . ?	<i>George Davey Smith, Mel Bartley, and David Blane</i>
25	Information and power	<i>Cecilio Mar Molinero and Mao Qing</i>
31	Does chaos reign?	<i>Andrew Philpott Morgan</i>
38	British Library cuts	<i>David Gordon</i>
39	Parliamentary questions about official statistics	<i>Alison Macfarlane</i>
<b>Subgroup Report</b>		
40	Health group report	<i>Alison Macfarlane</i>
<b>Proposals</b>		
41	A radical statistics initiative in official statistics	<i>Steve Simpson</i>
43	Proposal for a book on official statistics	<i>Andrew Philpott Morgan</i>
<b>Other</b>		
44	Troika News	<i>Steve Simpson</i>
45	Press publicity	<i>Alison Macfarlane</i>
45	Article Database	<i>Christy Maginn</i>
46	Radical Statistics Publications	
<b>Book Review</b>		
48	The visual display of quantitative information by Edward R. Tufte	<i>(by Steve Simpson)</i>

## Things to do

To help readers to respond to the various offers, requests, and pleas in this newsletter here is a check list of things to do.

1. Book your place at the Annual Conference page 4
2. Offer help with research into black young people in education to David Drew page 16
3. Suggest topics for Health Group meetings to Yoav Ben Shlomo page 40
4. Volunteer to cover topics for the *Unofficial guide to official health statistics* to Alison Macfarlane page 40
5. Offer to help with a public-meeting on the integrity of official statistics to Alison Macfarlane page 41
6. Offer to help with a book on official statistics to Andrew Philpott Morgan page 43
7. Offer to distribute promotional leaflets to Steve Simpson page 44
8. Offer to organise the 1992 Annual Conference to Steve Simpson page 44
9. Send in names of journalists to Steve Simpson page 45
10. Offer to help in producing an article database to Christy Maginn page 45
11. Send in your nomination for the Data Graphic Award to Steve Simpson page 48
12. Submit articles for the next newsletter to Jacky Holloway and Tina Posner Cover
13. Offer to edit a future newsletter to Steve Simpson Cover

### **"A user's guide to nineties nu-speak**

*'There is a disjunction between the figures and the real picture'*

= Believe the figures, for once.

*'Improved statistical base'*

= We're fiddling the figures again."

Quoted from Dan Atkinson in *The Guardian*, 3rd. December, 1990.

**RADICAL STATISTICS  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**SATURDAY 23 FEBRUARY 1991**

**10am to 5pm**

**at**

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICINE  
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS  
20 HYDE TERRACE  
LEEDS, LS2**

**Sessions include:**

***Radstats for the Community***  
***'Race' and Statistics***  
***'Poll' Tax***  
***Health Inequalities***  
***Peace Dividend***

**Fee: waged £5, unwaged £2**

**Further details from Trevor Sheldon  
Department of Public Health Medicine  
University of Leeds  
32 Hyde Terrace  
Leeds, LS2 9LN**

**Telephone: 0532 334854**

## Health group report

Alison Macfarlane

The Health Group has held two meetings since the last newsletter appeared. The first was a well attended discussion meeting in London on 12th. November at which George Davey Smith, Mel Bartley, and David Blane talked about their work on inequalities in health. This led to a lively discussion. The second, on 1st. December, was a smaller meeting to plan subgroup activities.

Yoav Ben Shlomo offered to organise further discussion meetings, at the rate of about one per term, with the occasional weekend meeting, so that meetings were not restricted to people within easy reach of London. Yoav would welcome suggestions for topics which people would like to discuss and people who could be invited to speak. He can be contacted at work on 071 387 7050 ext 5713. One of the discussion meetings will focus on the questions of 'What information do we have and what do we need?' in order to plan the conclusions section of the new *Unofficial guide to official health statistics*.

The main topic of discussion at the planning meeting was how to update *Facing the figures* without rewriting the book as a whole. It was decided to write a series of short pamphlets, focussing on the areas which are most relevant politically in 1990. Having done this, we could then discuss whether they could be merged into a book. The topics selected were 'needs', 'inequalities', 'how to demolish the myth of the growing health service', 'community care', 'international comparisons', 'general practice', and 'changes and commercialisation in the NHS'. This last topic would update the old sections on 'commercial medicine', 'privatisation', 'charges', 'prescribing', 'dentistry', and would set them in the context of the internal market and the NHS Act.

Some people may wish to start on some of the above and contact others who might have material or an interest in the subjects. It would not, however, take priority over finishing the *Unofficial guide to official health statistics*. At long last, work on this is seriously under way. It was, however, decided to review this priority if a general election suddenly became increasingly imminent. Meanwhile, although authors have been found for most sections of the *Unofficial guide*, there are a few areas not yet spoken for. These are 'DRGs', 'commercial medicine', 'prescription statistics', 'dental statistics', 'informal carers', and 'Ministry of Defence medical services'. Any volunteers should contact Alison Macfarlane, 40 Warwick Road, St Albans AL1 4DL, Tel 0727 52111.

## A radical statistics initiative in official statistics

Steve Simpson

As you would expect, this last year's debate on official statistics has entered our pages in the last three newsletters. We also responded as a group to the Royal Statistical Society's report 'Counting with confidence', issuing a press release after Alison Macfarlane attended its launch press conference (see RS46). The November Troika meeting discussed how we could make more of an impact.

The RSS and its Official Statistics Study Group seem to be concentrating on their proposals for the reorganisation of the government statistical service. The Troika felt that there is a need to discuss what have become known as the 'integrity' aspects of the issue, and to keep in the public eye the deterioration of government statistics which gave rise to the RSS discussion, and which most concerns statisticians and users of statistics.

We felt a public meeting to discuss the issues would be useful - a meeting to involve as many as possible of those concerned with the purpose of official statistics, including speakers who are not members of Radical Statistics. It might be held in the traditional place for statisticians' meetings, the London School of Hygiene in London. Contact Alison Macfarlane (details on inside cover) for details and with offers of help.

We also felt that a short statement would help to clarify our own approach and mobilise other opinions on this issue. We haven't achieved that. This more rambling effort is what I have come up with after drafts from myself and Andrew Philpott Morgan (including the list of issues below) drew no comment at all from the other half of the Troika!

There is a need to focus opposition to the Rayner doctrine that Government needs are the only determinant of official statistics, and to champion official statistics as providing a language to argue against the state as well as to monitor what it is doing. There is a need to itemise again the accusations that important social problems have been covered up, in unemployment, poverty, health and homelessness statistics for example. There is a need to investigate each of the accusations in some forum that can disseminate its findings.

Below is a starter list of issues which should be addressed.

1. The selection of what information is produced and how it is produced, and the

extent to which it reflects government policy or genuine investigation.

2. The pressures on statisticians which can lead to a conflict of interest between professional integrity and political expediency.
3. The routine and sometimes cynical suppression and delay of information when it does not fit dominant political views.
4. The adjustment or change of data series which can lead to unreliable information and damage to policy assessment.
5. Information not used in the context in which it would be socially most useful.
6. The selective, misleading and sometimes inaccurate presentation of statistics.
7. The lack of methodological research on proposed or actual changes to data series.
8. The misuse of methodologies which one would not expect from experienced statisticians.
9. The mystification of social problems by presentation of statistics in technical terms.
10. The serious impact of cost-cutting on quality and coverage and the subsequent damage and cost to public services and the economy.

# **Help!**

## **Proposal for a book on official statistics**

*Andrew Philpott Morgan*

A book is has been proposed on the demise of official statistics post-Rayner and help is needed both in editing and particularly in contributions. The following have so far been suggested or offered:-

### **Overview**

- \* History and ideology of Rayner
- \* International comparisons - structure and policy
- \* How serious is the deterioration of official statistics?

### **Case studies**

- \* Crime statistics
- \* Poll tax and local government finance
- \* Poverty and low incomes
- \* Homelessness/housing statistics
- \* Environmental and pollution statistics
- \* Education testing and performance
- \* School closures and/or the lack of provision
- \* Health statistics and the NHS \* Race statistics
- \* Employment and/or unemployment statistics
- \* Trade & Industrial statistics and the decline of Britain
  
- \* Conclusion - what has gone wrong with official statistics?

Can you help? Do you have any suggestions? Are you interested in making a contribution that is not on this list?

Contact

*Andrew Philpott Morgan*  
20a, Dunollie Road,  
London,  
NW5 2XP  
071 485 9968

## Troika News

*Steve Simpson*

Much of the Troika's discussion at its November meeting is reflected elsewhere in this Newsletter, namely, the production of contents lists of past newsletters, the new promotional leaflet that might be enclosed, and an initiative on official statistics.

The promotional leaflet had three major redrafts during the year by Andrew Philpott Morgan, and with comments from the rest of us, it was finally laid out and put to rest by myself. There will probably be 1 500 printed (I'm writing before it's been done), so let us know if you can use them locally. And please make comments for changes in the next edition.

David Drew is working on a survey of the 250 Radstats members to find out who we are, what we most want out of Radstats and what we're willing to contribute. It may well be piloted at the Annual Conference and sent out with the next newsletter.

One administrative proposal for the AGM is to make membership for a calendar year, starting in 1992. At present it's for three issues of the newsletter from the start of payment, with a fourth newsletter if subscription has not been renewed. It's a pain to keep track of the reminders through the year.

The Troika (which is elected at each Annual Conference) has taken most of this past year feeling its way, trying to implement the last conference's advice to become a bit more organised. Minutes of Troika meetings are now sent to subgroup convenors, who are also invited to the meetings along with the next newsletter editor. There's been one meeting between each newsletter.

Thanks to Waqar Ahmad, Trevor Sheldon, and Colin Thunhurst for getting the Annual Conference organised, with as usual not very long notice and some arm-twisting. Subscribers will all have received a full notice and booking form; if not, see the notice elsewhere in this Newsletter. Does anyone want to offer to arrange the 1992 Annual Conference?

## Press publicity

*Alison Macfarlane*

At the last AGM, someone suggested that we should press-release our newsletter. On reconsideration, it was decided to implement this suggestion by compiling a list of journalists who are known to be interested in reading and using our material. We could then send them the newsletter and even invite them to subscribe. This process has already started, and two journalists have taken out subscriptions. If you know of any journalists to be added to our list, please send their names and addresses to Steve Simpson. In addition, if you are contributing an article in a subject area which is new to Radical Statistics and know of journalists who may be interested, please send their names and addresses in with the article.

## Article Database

*Christy Maginn*

A full list of all articles ever written and published in the Newsletter has been compiled. Unfortunately I do not have free access to word processing facilities and so I am sending out a request for anyone who:

- a) has the time (estimated to be 5 to 7 hours),
- b) has the access to word processing and/or database facilities (dbase3 preferably),
- c) has the willingness

to transfer this list to a suitable computer system. It could be done over a period of time. It is hoped that in future members would be able to request copies of particular articles (at a small cost) from the archives.

**Can anyone help?**

*Christy Maginn,  
12 Spring Close,  
Maidenhead,  
SL6 7HA*

## Radical Statistics Publications

1. Radical Statistics Health Group, (1976), 'Whose priorities?' A critique of Health and Personal Social Services for England, Out of print; photocopy available.
2. Radical Statistics Health Group, (1977), 'In defence of the NHS.' An attack on fee for service payments in medical care, Out of print; photocopy available.
3. (1978), 'RAW(P) deals'. A critique of 'Sharing resources for health in England'. Out of print; photocopy available.
4. (1978), 'Social indicators for individual or social control?' The case of OECD. Out of print.
5. Radical Statistics Health Group, (1981), 'The unofficial guide to official health statistics', second edition. £1.00 to private individuals, trades unions, community health councils, and voluntary groups, £2.00 to libraries and public institutions, and £5.00 to private institutions and companies, plus 25p postage and packing.
6. Runnymede Trust and Radical Statistics Health Group, (1988), 'Britain's black population'. Second edition. Published by Gower.
7. Radical Statistics Health Group and Local Radio Workshop, (1980), "A better start in life?" Why perinatal rates vary in different parts of the country. Audio cassette with notes available from Local Radio Workshop, 12 Praed Mews, London, W2. £2.00 to individuals, community groups, and trade union branches, and £5.00 to others.
8. Radical Statistics Nuclear Disarmament Group, (1982), 'The nuclear numbers game: understanding the statistics behind the bombs'. £1.50 plus 50p postage and packing.
9. David Jones, Peter Smith, Pat Kinnersley, Radical Statistics Health Group, (1982), 'Two statistical methods for detecting hazards at work'. Out of print; photocopy available.
10. Radical Statistics Education Group, (1982), 'Reading between the numbers'. A critical guide to educational research. £1.25 plus 25p postage and packing.
11. Radical Statistics Health Group, (1985), 'Unsafe in their hands'. Health service statistics for England. Superseded by publication number 13.

12. (1987), 'Statistics in Nicaragua'. £1.00.
13. Radical Statistics Health Group, (1987), 'Facing the figures'. What really is happening to the National Health Service. £3.95 plus 50p postage and packing.
14. Radical Statistics Education Group, (1987), 'Figuring out education spending'. Trends for 1978-85 and their meaning. £1.00 plus 25p postage and packing.

### See also:

John Irvine, Ian Miles, and Jeff Evans (editors), (1979), 'Demystifying social statistics'. Published by Pluto Press. Now distributed by Dent at £9.95.

When ordering a publication that is out of print but for which photocopies are available, please enclose £2 for each such publication.

Please send orders to the Radical Statistics Group, c/o Steve Simpson, 41 Park Crescent, Bradford, BD3 0JZ. Cheques should be made payable to 'Radical Statistics'.