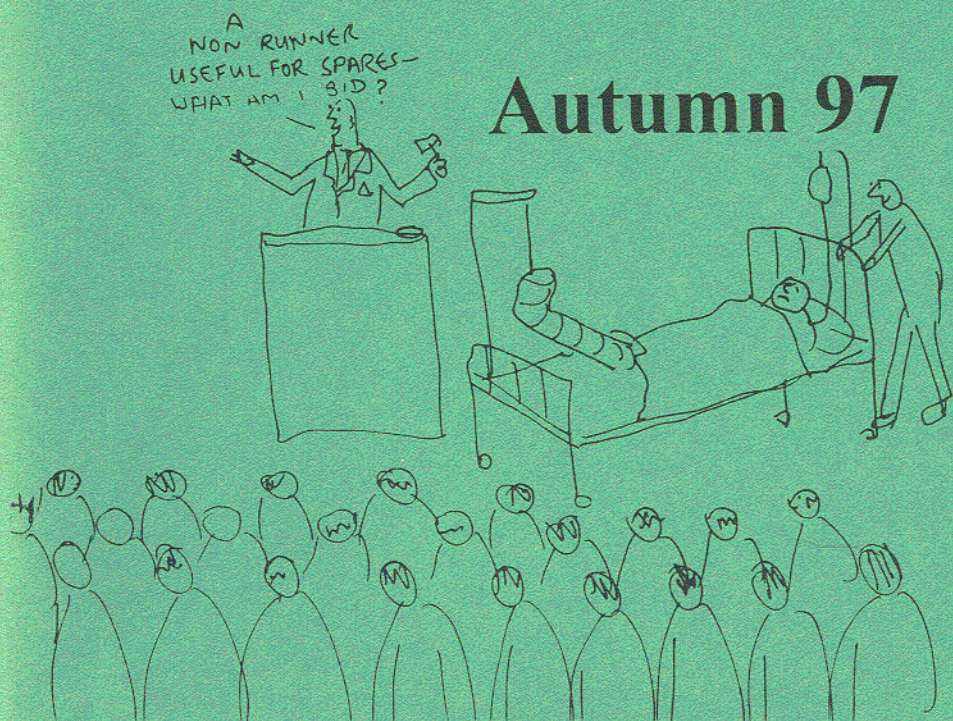


Radical Statistics 66

A
NON RUNNER
USEFUL FOR SPARES—
WHAT AM I, SID?

Autumn 97



The **Radical Statistics Group** is a group of individuals based on the distribution of this newsletter. The small amount of central administration work is done by a committee known as 'The Troika', and elected at the Annual General Meeting. The editorship of this newsletter rotates; details of how to subscribe are given below and details of how to contribute are given on the inside back cover. Apart from producing this newsletter, the work of the RSG is done by its sub-groups 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.

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Radical Statistics Conference:
London, October 1997
**What information do we
need?**

To understand what is happening , to make
policy?

A new Government has been elected with an overwhelming majority with many problems to be addressed following the neglect of nearly two decades. But with a downgraded statistical service, to what extent do we know what those problems are? How is policy to be formed in these situations? What are the social and financial costs of inadequate policies? What is the cost of not having a satisfactory range of statistics?

These are some of the issues to be discussed at the conference in the areas of

- Education
- Economy and national accounting
- Health
- Health service
- Social welfare
- Social services
- Poverty and wealth
- Housing
- 'Race' and minority groups

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Radical Statistics:
Annual General Meeting

Department of Social Policy, University of
Bristol

28th February 1998

What can be done about inequality in society?

A call for papers or speakers highlighting the various aspects of
inequality.

Contact:

Dave Gordon

0117 974 1117 x222

Radical Statistics composer wanted

Radical Statistics is designed and laid out anew almost every issue, as each new editor seeks someone to help with the layout or does it on their own. We are now seeking a steady publication composer and therefore improvement in layout. The job is open to anyone with a computer with Word and Excel (or equivalent), email and a laser printer. The composer would have to be available to work intensively during the week after the deadline of each issue when the editor(s) send material ready for the issue. Typing will not be necessary, and the editor(s) will proof-read. Experience in layout and design of publications is an advantage but not essential. Payment of £2 a page may be negotiable. Apply to the current editors or Troika (contacts in the front of this issue) as soon as possible: the successful applicant will work on the next issue, deadline November 30th.

Capital & Class

Journal of the Conference of Socialist Economists

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News

from the Troika

The landslide against the Tories being greater than most of us anticipated, we now have the first Labour Government in office in a generation and whatever we think of its policies, this is a significant event, a vote for change. It brought with it a change in the political landscape: the number of women MPs doubled, it included half a dozen openly gay MPs including one cabinet minister, and the average age dropped significantly as we have a younger, hopefully more enthusiastic, House of Commons. Most are united in the belief that much has gone wrong in Britain over the last couple of decades and they will be looking for fresh ideas about how to put it right. A major problem they will face is a matter which has concerned those of us campaigning from below in *Radical Statistics* for many years: while we all 'know' from experience many of the social dislocations, information is thin on the ground and many policies where they exist are blind both to the situation, and have little idea of how effective they are.

These issues provide great opportunities for *Radical Statistics* which has led to a proposed conference in London in October, the exact date to be decided, on *What information do we need?* For this we have a set of provisional topics and we are looking for papers as well as ideas for the conference. This needs to be a priority

for our work in the near future and further details are given below

The RADSTATS AGM and conference will take place at the Department of Social Policy at Bristol in the last weekend in February 1998 on the subject of *What can be done about inequality in society?* Here we hope to look at the nature of inequality, its scale and measurement: sexual, 'racial', class, in education, in health etc.

An alternative AGM has been proposed as a weekend in the lake district, while we think this is an excellent idea for a social weekend later in the year with walks, talks and some drinking.

Our promotional leaflet has been updated to bring it into the 1990s and part of it is currently being rewritten. Several new broadsheets have been proposed on topics such as food poisoning, crime, health, poverty and strength of economy.

On internet matters we are attempting to extend information provided by e-mail to new subscribers and also there have been some further thoughts on setting up a RADSTATS web page.

Then there is the new RADSTATS book. We have reason to be the most optimistic for RADSTATS for quite some time!

Andrew Philpott Morgan for the Troika

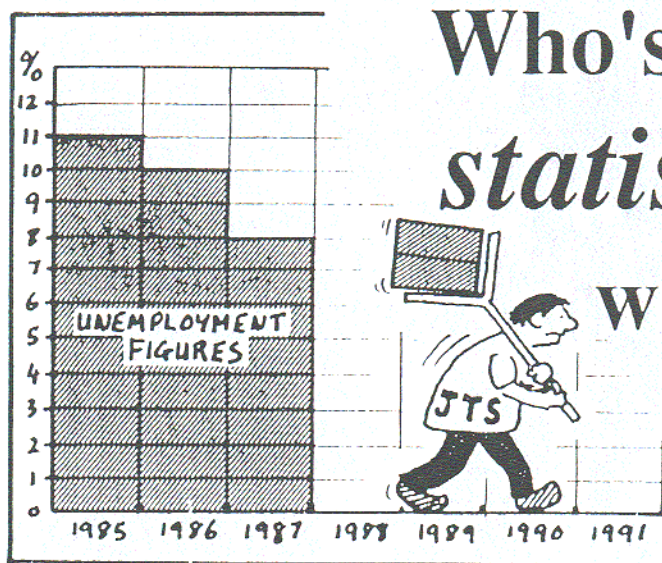
Statistics in Society: a book by Radical Statisticians

In the last issue of the newsletter we gave details of a book proposal to produce a new radical statistics book - updating the highly successful *Demystifying Social Statistics*. A contract has now been signed with Arnold Publishers to provide *Statistics in Society for their Applications in Statistics* series - thanks very much to Nicki Denis and the (many) anonymous reviewers for their comments on the outline (see Newsletter 64/66 pages 38-39 for a draft contents list). The book will contain 40 chapters of around 3000 words each, each written by different authors, drawing largely on recent submissions to the newsletter but also on other material. At the time of writing many potential authors have been approached but if you have not, and feel you have a chapter to offer that can be prepared by the end of October, please get in touch with one of the editors of this newsletter as soon as possible. The book will be illustrated by photographs and approximately one graph or diagram per page. All Royalties are to go to Radical Statistics, but chapter authors will get some perks (free and cheap books). The chapters will concentrate on the topics usually found in this newsletter, but authors will be encouraged to write in the context of the following themes:

1. Statistics as mystification, the use of technical language to disguise social problems as technical ones.
2. Statistics as power, used to support positions and ideologies within exploitive relations between individuals and groups, (usually) reproducing the status quo.
3. Statistics as a social product, not independent of who commissions, produces, disseminates and interprets them.
4. Those aware of these negative roles of statistics have an antidote: they can demystify statistics, and develop them to further broad and popular aims

Chapters will be commissioned from Arnold to be written or revise over the summer of 1997 with the manuscript to be finalized by the end of the year and published in 1998. It will be edited by the editors of this newsletter. Any offers of advise, suggestions or even criticism would be welcome - but most welcome now - as the project begins.

Danny and Ludi



Who's being *statistical* with the truth?

Statistics have made their way into virtually every area of modern society. In every political controversy statistics are produced to justify one claim or another.

Does this mean that statistics are produced by technical criteria but misused? Are statistical methods themselves shaped by vested interests, by political influences and ideological viewpoints? Are statistical results presented to justify decisions or as a means of understanding the needs of society?

Are statistics presented in a fragmented and restricted way which prevents some questions being researched or even asked? Do they often mystify rather than explain? Can they be demystified and made useful to more people?

What do these questions mean for people working in statistics, for research and for teaching? These are amongst the questions which the Radical Statistics Group is addressing. If these questions concern you, why don't you join us?

*Concerned
about valid,
reliable
statistics?*

*Worried about
the integrity of
statistical
work?*

Radical Statistics

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On joining, you will receive Radical Statistics three times a year and all news of special events. Make cheques payable to 'Radical Statistics'. Send this form to Radical Statistics (subs), c/o 10 Ruskin Avenue, Bradford BD9 6EB

Ring the letters that describe your interests.

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| E Education | T Transport |
| F Economic statistics | U Trades Union campaigns |
| G Government statistics | W Statisticians as workers |
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| L Local government | Z Other (write in): |
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Please deduct from my account no.:

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Signed: _____

Radical Statistics is usually produced three times per year.

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In accordance with the Data Protection Act, any member of the Radical Statistics Group is entitled to ask:

- a) For a printout of his/her personal details and name and address as kept on the Radical Statistics Group computer.
- b) That his/her personal details do not be so stored. Anyone wishing to avail themselves of this right, please contact the Troika (address on inside front cover) with requests in triplicate.

Contributions to Radical Statistics

All readers of *Radical Statistics* are invited to contribute to the newsletter. Articles may vary from brief notices to detailed articles. Letters and reviews are also welcome. Contributions should be sent to the next editor using the address and guidelines below.

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Deadline for copy: 30th November 1997

For those with access to computers the next editor will take contributions preferably on 3.5" DOS discs, using Wordperfect, Microsoft Word, or ASCII text mentioning the hardware the discs were prepared on. Please also include a hard copy of the contribution. Ideally use 2 cm margins, Bookman (or alternative) 13 pt for text, 18 pt bold for subheadings, 18 pt italics for your name, and 24 pt bold for the title. If you haven't got access to a computer, paper is quite acceptable, but a lot of extra work for the editor. Graphs, charts and diagrams should be on paper, in clear print ready to copy.

Refereed articles: an attempt to improve quality

If you wish comments on your article before publication, please state this and send three copies (but no disc) to one of the editors. Two readers will review your article for clarity and relevance to the concerns of *Radical Statistics* - see back cover - and may suggest improvements. The editors may then require you to make alterations before publication. Articles not refereed will receive minimal editorial change and are likely to appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

Radical Statistics - who are we?

The Radical Statistics Group was formed in January 1975 by statisticians and research workers with a common concern about the political assumptions and implications of much of their work, and an awareness of the actual and potential misuse of statistics and its techniques. The group is independent from any other organisation, but members are radical in the sense of committed to helping to build a more free, egalitarian and democratic society.

Our concerns Among our particular concerns are:

- The mystifying use of technical language in order to disguise social problems as technical ones
- The lack of control by the community over the aims of statistical investigations, the way these are conducted and the use of information produced
- The power structures within which statistical workers are employed, and which control the work and the uses to which it is put

The fragmentation of problems into separate specialist fields to the detriment of common problems