

Editorial

This is our last editorial; having edited issues 63, 64/65, 66 and now 67 the editorship is passing to Christina Pantazis before the power goes to our heads! Her correspondence address for all for articles is on the inside back page of the cover. A co-editor will be appointed at the AGM in February to work with Christina. If any of you are interested please put your name forward to a member of the troika (addresses in inside over). The model of rolling editors on, after a year's worth of issues, seems to work well and we hope it can be continued. The newsletter/journal now has a paid composer to work with the editors, Estelle Percy, who typeset this and the last issue. So the job of editing is hopefully less arduous than it used to be!

A lot has happened to the Radical Statistics Group in the year. The health subgroup have been actively campaigning against the private finance initiative, and Sue Kerrison has secured a contract to publish the second edition of the unofficial guide to official statistics with Arnold. The AGM will be held during the Radical Statistics annual conference which is being organized by David Gordon this year and will take place in Bristol on February 28, 1998, with the theme being 'Inequalities'. Further information about the conference, open to all, is included.

Despite retiring as editors we will still be busy with Radical Statistics next year, editing the book 'Statistics in Society' on behalf of the group. By the time you read this, all the second and final drafts of chapters by over fifty authors will be in with the publisher and ready for typesetting, proof reading, grouping, illustrating, introducing, and indexing! Our warm thanks to all those who have delivered. First drafts at the time of writing: Waqar Ahmad, Mel Bartley, Richard Bate, David Blane, Nic Brimblecombe, James Cornford, George Davey Smith, Pauline Davis, Roy Davies, Angela Dale, Paul Dunne, Jane Elliot, Jeff Evans, Alan Freeman, Jay Ginn, Harvey Goldstein, David Gordon, Anne Green, Walid Hamid, Jenny Head, Pauline Heslop, Ron Johnston, Peter Lee, Alison Macfarlane, Cecilio Mar Molinero, Donald MacKenzie, John Martyr, Ian Miles, James Nazroo, Theo Nichols, Ian Parker, Christina Pantazis, Charles Pattie, Jamie Peck, Daine Perrons, Ian Plewis, Allyson Pollock, Ivan Rappaport, David Rossiter, Mary Shaw, David Sibley, Anne Singleton, Anthony Staines, Humphrey Southall, Jo Southworth, Ray Thomas, Graham Upton, Rebekah Widdowfield, Daniel Wright, and especially to Nicki Denis and Majorie Durham at Arnold who have the job of organising them all!

Best wishes to all for 1998

Danny Dorling & Ludi Simpson, December 1997

STATISTICS, NEWS AND COMMENTS

*Government statistics news
Compiled by the editors*

GHS Review

ONS published their review of multi-purpose surveys in the summer. The GHS will be run next year (1998/9) and further consideration will be given to making it biennial, possibly with a larger sample size. Generally the report is very thorough

Official Statistics beyond the year 2000

This was the title of November's Statistics Users Council conference where Ivan Fellegi - Director of Statistics Canada - gave a keynote paper in which he says that the most important role for statistical agencies is to assist the public policy process. Fellegi identifies specific problem areas: unemployment and the evolving character of employment, the causes of health and illness, the role of education and training. He referred to analysis of a variety of measures designed to deal with high unemployment, and statistical data systems, 'some of them quite innovative' that are needed to disentangle the relative importance of different causes.

In contrast, Dennis Roberts, Director of Socio-economic statistics at the UK's Office for National Statistics, said that the job of the ONS is to provide a statistical service for its customers.. There was no mention of social problems. He talked about partnerships, harmonisation of survey questions, dealing with gaps, improving access. Tim Holt, Director on the ONS, talked of changing world conditions and the nature of the problems facing governments in advanced industrial countries in ways which are parallel to Fellegi's paper.

But while Fellegi said that the participation of the social science community is fundamental, Holt did not mention social science or social scientists. Neither Roberts nor Holt mentioned unemployment or health.

Contributors to the Radical Statistics mailbase suggested that this poor showing indicates a generation of senior government statisticians

brought up under 18 years of Thatcherism who see their work as keeping the government and other 'customers' happy; they have no serious interest in investigation of social problems.

And that this is very much to do with the marketing of statistics. Users means principally business users because they can pay - but presumably this is not just a matter of attitude, but the introduction of market criteria into civil service activities. Harman's hostile response to the 54 social policy professors over benefits suggests this government is not going to be any more open to input from social scientists.

Homeless in Bradford

Local authorities have been encouraged to count the number of homeless on the streets, in order to apply for a pot of government money for homeless projects. Department of Environment, Transport and Regions guidelines warn the volunteer census-takers against entering disused or derelict buildings, which may be dangerous. This was the reason, say housing activists and the projects that stand to lose, that only 3 homeless were counted.

White British

These are the words that government is seriously

proposing as one of three possible amendments to the census question on ethnic group, now out to consultation before a White Paper in the Autumn. Along with this box would be a White Other option. What could be understood by this phrase. If not fascist organisations in Britain, then perhaps nationality? Either way, these terms would be wholly counterproductive of a successful census.

White British does not have the same connotation as Black British, Black Asian, and Mixed which are the other changes offered for this question. One could argue however that these categories would contain people of such different backgrounds, experiences and demands, that they any sensible analysis with the results of a question on ethnic group would be very much more difficult.

Census and politics in Palestine

As we were going to press, the Israeli government declared that it will not allow Palestinian enumerators to work in East Jerusalem. It is clearly not looking forward to a peaceful development for the city's

population. We hope to have more news in the next issue.

Census and politics in the USA.

Also as we were going to press, the US congress voted against the use of sampling in preparing the main reports from the next census in the year 2000. The US census Bureau had wanted to include an allowance for those who are not counted -

usually a disproportionate number of black citizens and inner city residents. The census reports are used to set the number of representatives from each state and to distribute federal funds. Those states which would have lost out from the proposed changes are those who are currently over-represented in congress and voted the bill down.

Radical Statistics News

Summer on the list

Discussions on the Radical Statistics electronic discussion list this summer have had a distinctly economic flavour with unemployment statistics and the Consumer Price Index as the hot topics. More of these later but first the News Summary. Conferences announcements have included the Maternity Alliance conference *Look in the perambulators: the public health challenge of children born in poverty, Africa and Globalisation, Maths Education and Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists*. Courses were advertised on Longitudinal Study and the Survey Methods. Books in the news included books for review, books for Bosnia,

rescuing historical books from the ONS' big give-away and the important advance announcement of the new Radical Statistics book *Statistics in Society* ed. by Danny Dorling and Ludi Simpson.. This book aims to replace the much loved, read and quoted 70s book *Demystifying Social Statistics* and will be published by Arnold in 1998 [It could never replace *Demystifying! Add to it, perhaps* - eds]. There were requests for, critiques of the role of information in NHS purchasing, critiques of GNP, people to write critically from statistical perspective about handling of the BSE crisis and requests for good stories

from the Observer new health correspondent - 76 people, not all from this list, contacted him. The LOKA institute, a community research network based in USA which aimed to promote research undertaking collaboratively with grassroots, public interest and workers posted a mailing entitled *Science Inc vs Science for Everyone*.

Prior to the election the health group, in conjunction with the NHS federation published and posted four critical pamphlets on the Conservative governments performance in health care: *More patients treated?*, *More nurses and doctors?*, *NHS and spending*, and *the NHS and Private Finance Initiative*. The first of these *More patients treated?* used the GHS which was under threat at that time to demonstrate the disparity between inflated NHS statistics about numbers of hospital admissions and numbers of people who reported they had been hospitalised in the GHS. The list publicised the review and final report of the consultative exercise undertaken by Department of Health on Social Services data. The government's intention of initiating a new Black Report that is to say a report of inequalities in health was also announced and received a mixed reception with some members feeling that the research evidence which had

accumulated over many years was overwhelming and what was needed was action not more research.

Alan Freeman alerted members to the interest being shown by ONS in applying the methods devised by Boskin Commission in USA to Consumer Price Index. Boskin argued that increases in prices are inflated by improvements to the quality of goods and the element of "quality improvements" needs to be taken out of CPI. This would have the effect of continually depressing benefits and wages increased achieved through collective bargaining, thereby saving the government loads of money on the benefits bill. This proposal was heavily criticised in USA not because of its effects on benefits but because of implication that inflation had been over estimated for decades. Alan pointed members who were interested to the critique published by Economic Policy Institute Washington DC 20036. Ray Thomas dug further and found ONS were clearly taking this seriously as Michael Baxter from ONS had written a paper on this entitled "Is the RPI biased?". This was published in October's Economic Trends. At Ray's suggestion the Official Statistics Section of RSS is organising a meeting on Boskin.

In September ONS announced a meeting for the Official Statistics Section of RSS on *Improvements to Labour Market Statistics* then cancelled, replacing it with a meeting on *Unpaid work in the household*. The cancelled meeting was to describe the progress ONS was making in developing "new ways of presenting available data to give a full a picture as possible of the UK labour market". This provoked some peppery remarks from Ray Thomas who had just completed a chapter on Labour Market statistics for the new RadStats book. According to Ray the problem was not just one of presentations but there were major defects in the way unemployment was measured. Moreover ONS did not appear too vigorous in alerting the government or the public to the fact that measures of unemployment were in grave danger losing touch with reality. Where was the Government Statisticians' Collective who in *Demystifying Social Statistics* had written a chapter "How official statistics are produced: A view from the inside", Why weren't they shouting now? Are the walls of the new ONS office so thick?

I was surprised how much of interest I had missed - how about you? The list now has 168 members, 23 of these have non UK addresses. You can join

the mail list by sending the following message to mailbase@mailbase.acuk
join radstats your name
stop

If you are interested in the discussions about these topics, any member can get back files by sending the following message (amended if you want other months) to the same address.

send radstats 1997-06
stop

This will send a file of all the messages archived for June 1997.

Susan Kerrison
November 1997

REVIEWS

Population matters: the local dimension

Edited by Tony Champion

(1993: Paul Chapman Publishing)

Population and population change are so fundamental that their causes and consequences might be thought to be well-understood. But that is not the case. One reason is the length of time it takes for population change to have appreciable social consequences. Thus the phrase 'demographic time bomb' - the baby boom of the 1960s and the following and continuing trough in births had a speedy impact on maternity services and a medium-term impact on educational planning, but its consequences will be felt in the labour market and retirement for decades to come. It was itself partly a result of an earlier baby boom of the 1940's.

The causes of a demographic indicator such as the number of births are even more complex than its effects. The number of women of child-bearing age is a result of previous generations' experience - of war, family planning, and work among other things. The rate at which they bear children will be a result of the same and other kinds of influences. Changes from one year to another may be

eventually seen as either delayed child bearing or a more permanent reduction in family size: one cannot tell which is the case until those women have finished their child-bearing days, when cohort rather than time-period measures can be calculated. The same time lag makes it equally difficult to isolate the causes of mortality, and to measure trends in household formation.

Migration is also hard to predict, but it is a major feature of the local dimension of population change which this book addresses. Sometimes migration is pulled by employment opportunities as in North East Scotland's services for the off-shore oil industry, but the lack of new jobs does not inevitably push population away; sometimes migration is led by large housing developments in estates or new towns, but equally large population shifts take place when existing housing stock gets overcrowded on the one hand or taken over by single people on the other hand.

Emigration to other countries is often associated with economic recession - on a local scale as much as on a national scale in Ireland's famine; but for individual people it is not the poorest but those with resources who are able to emigrate. It is the choice of destination that reflects economic opportunities, so immigration is probably more economically-linked than emigration. Post-war immigration to Britain was often from specific overseas regions to specific locations in Britain, to where immigration now continues despite lack of an employment welcome.

This book does well to demonstrate the variety of demographic experiences locally. Often the variety comes from a national phenomenon - smaller households, cohabitation, or the baby boom - being played out on very different local context, whether inner city, new town or retirement area.

The book includes a little of the causes of local population change - results from a small survey of the reasons for migration, for example - but much more about the policy responses. Its chapter on ethnic minorities has a welcome section on the political implication of spatial concentration, in its electoral

and anti-racist aspects (by Vaughan Robinson). Its chapter on household change emphasises the political, planning, and social contradictions which influence housing development together with demographic change (by Dave King). Its chapter on school education charts the very different responses locally to falling school rolls (by Michael Bradford). Other chapters deal with local population forecasts, migration, local government finance, the labour force, care for the elderly, and health care planning.

Ludi Simpson