

NEW EDITOR!

This newsletter will shortly have a new editor. **Dr R. J. (Dick) Brook**, a Reader in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Massey University, will be editing the newsletter as from the next issue, No. 15. Dick is well-known to many of the association's members—he has taught at Massey University for 14 years, participated in the association's annual conferences, and is the co-author of at least two statistics books.

Submission of news items, articles, letters-to-the-editor, and, advertisements should be made to...

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COMMENTS ON A FORUM FOR 7TH FORM TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS WITH STATISTICS

By **Brian Dawkins**

About forty teachers, academics and statisticians participated in a one day forum for 7th form teachers involved with the Mathematics with Statistics option. This was organised jointly by the NZ Statistical Association and the Department of Continuing Education at Victoria University, and was held on the Victoria University campus. The focus was on the practical component, and in particular, the statistical aspects of that component.

Our Beloved President And Leader Of The Faithful, **Peter Thomson**, (VUW) gave a short welcoming address, and he was followed by **David Vere-Jones** (VUW) who discussed the background to, and aims of, the prescription for the practical component. He was followed by **Paul Ackerley**, an inspector with the Department of Education, who presented some of the materials available to teachers and attempted to field some sticky questions.

The remainder of the morning was given to short presentations on such things as, suitable reference texts (**Peter Thomson**), available data sets (**Mike Camden**, Wellington Polytechnic), some practical project advice (**Shirley Pledger**, VUW), surveys (**Vince Galvin**, Department of Statistics), and some teaching experiences (**Barbara Robertson**, Wellington Girls' College, and **Elizabeth Robinson**, Queen Margaret's College).

After a pleasant hot lunch at Vicky's Restaurant in the Student Union Building, the forum reconvened for a discussion of assessment. This involved each of four invited speakers **Pat Belgrave** (Marsden Collegiate),

Paul Ackerley (Department of Education), **Megan Clark** (VUW) and **Robert Davies** (AMD/DSIR).

Each gave their assessment of a project that had been submitted by a student last year. All participants had had a copy of the project since registering in the morning and had thus had a chance to browse through it.

This session was well received and aroused a lot of interest.

Finally, **Gordon Knight** of Massey University, summed up proceedings, and gave us some interim thoughts on his preparation of a summary of the projects presented throughout the country in 1986.

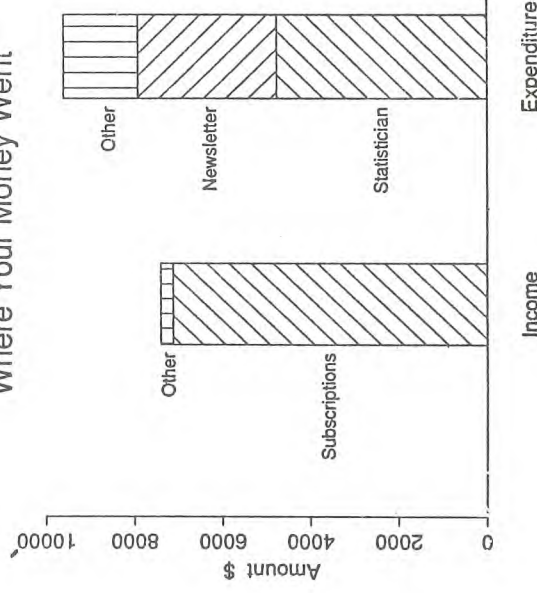
Many then enjoyed an informal afternoon tea in the Restoration Cafe, discussing aspects of the day and sharing experiences. The nett feeling seemed to be that the day had been a good morale booster: it always helps to find that you are not alone in the struggle with recalcitrant material, and intransigent conditions.

MORE THAN YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

By **Alex Neill**

What a bargain it has been to belong to the New Zealand Statistical Association! For this last year, members have been receiving more in services than they have been paying for in subscriptions. As you can see from the graph, our income did not even cover the cost of *The New Zealand Statistician* and the *newsletter*. "But how can this be?" you may ask.

Where Your Money Went



Well, we've been living off our fat, is the answer. Healthy bank accounts generated by such things as calculator and statistical software displays have been subsidising subscriptions. A quick check through previous years accounts shows this is no new trend, but,

unfortunately our reserves can't last forever. And this is 1987, a year in which "subsides" is a dirty word.

So now the bad news. We can't maintain our bargain basement subs next year. Something has to give, either subscriptions or service. The executive committee is convinced that the range of the association's activities should grow, not shrink. So, I'm afraid, folks, that your friendly treasurer will be recommending a price hike at the next AGM. Please remember all the wonderful bargains you have been receiving over the last few years when we discuss the price increase at the AGM. We will aim to continue to be one of the best buys around.

HISTORY OF STATISTICS IN NZ By Sharleen D. Forbes

The New Zealand Statistical Association has decided to use the latest grant from Professor J. T. Campbell to provide some initial impetus to the study of the **History of Statistics in New Zealand**. This is being done in the following ways:

(1) The creation of a **Tape Archive** of the early history of statistics as remembered by early statisticians. This work is currently being undertaken by myself and David Vere-Jones with assistance from Judith Fife of the Oral Archive of the National Library. An interview with Professor Campbell has already been recorded. Both David and I currently have copies of the tapes and a copy will shortly be available from the Oral Archive. A transcript of the tapes has been completed and is available from Professor David Vere-Jones, Institute of Statistics and OR, Victoria University of Wellington, Private Bag, Wellington.

(2) The holding of a **One-day Conference** at Victoria University of Wellington on Wednesday, 1st July. This will tentatively consist of 4 sessions on the following topics: Government Statistics, The Development of Statistics Teaching, University Statistics, and, Links with the United Kingdom. Speakers will include Len Cook, Stan Roberts, Garry Tee and hopefully, Ian Dick and Geoff Jowett. The NZ Statistical Association will hold its Annual General Meeting in conjunction with this conference.

BOOK REVIEW by Stephen Haslett

"Misused Statistics: Straight Talk for Twisted Numbers", by A. J. Jaffe and H. S. Spierer. Marcel Dekker, Inc., New York, 1987. Price \$US35.50 (outside USA).

As stated in the preface, the aim of this book is to allow each of its readers "to be a critical observer of the statistical scene". The goal is to show non-statisticians "how to spot misuses in the media (including scholarly and professional journals) and in public statements", and to help "professional statisticians (including teachers) and those who must interpret and publish articles which include or are based on statistics...to avoid statistical misuse". For the authors a misuse is "using numbers in such a manner that—either by intent, or through ignorance or carelessness—the conclusions are unjustified or incorrect". They believe, I think quite correctly, that students of statistics can learn from a study of misuses as an adjunct to learning the right way to apply statistical tools, and also that for many students "as the statistical theories of the classroom fade away with time, the lessons learned from the study of misuses will become more important".

"Misused Statistics" has its origins in a series of articles (by the authors of the book) which appeared in

the *New York Statistician*. Its fifteen chapters draw on those articles, and illustrate problems of varying complexity.

The first part of the book (to the middle of chapter 7—the division is my own) is elementary in character, dealing with categories of misuse (lack of knowledge, faulty interpretation of data or results, incorrect data, inadequate analytical methodology), data quality, graphics and presentation, and basic methodology. Because I have only peripheral involvement with undergraduate teaching I find it difficult to assess this section of the book in comparison with others of its kind. I did however find that examples simplified from real life by "Dr Nowall" particularly where they involved bluntness, rather tedious; fortunately such examples were few in number, and there were a large number of "real life" illustrations. The pace was to my mind also rather slow and the explanations at times perhaps a little simplistic, but these are not a major criticism given the wide range of readership for which the book is intended.

The second part of the book, dealing with real life methodological examples, faulty interpretation, surveys and polls, Ockham's razor, affirmative action, insubstantial statistics ("ectoplasticities" is their term), and misuse by government and international agencies, I found much more a "good read" with its wealth of real life examples. It is these examples, together with a lesser number in the first section, which give this book its strength and worth. Many of these have a particularly North American slant, but there is a wide range of examples from Salvador to Ethiopia, from Incas to China, and two references to New Zealand (p.51-53, p.188).

The discussion in the text however is on occasion incomplete without details of the references, and my regret concerning the examples is that it will be difficult to obtain a number of the references in New Zealand, appearing as they do in back copies of US newspapers.

I have only two clear disagreements with the text, and both of these are minor. On p.147 a coin tossing experiment is suggested with probability of heads being given as 0.5; no reference is made to a "fair coin". Figure 6.3 is meant to be an exponential curve illustrating 7% growth per year but has the appearance of a freehand straight line with slight bends at each end, and is thus confusing given the discussion of its non-linearity in the text.

In summary, I believe, as do the authors, that information on misuse of statistics, as contained in the book, would be a useful adjunct both to mainstream and service courses in statistics, and that "Misused Statistics" contains a wealth of relevant practical examples. Perhaps the major bar to its use in undergraduate courses will be its price (\$US35.50) but given sufficient demand this may be addressed, given time, by a paperback edition.

1987 AUSTRALASIAN MEETING OF THE ECONOMETRIC SOCIETY

To be held at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, from Wednesday, 26 August to Friday, 28 August, 1987. Abstracts should be submitted by 30 April, and complete papers by 1 June, 1987. There will be three concurrent sessions of contributed papers, in the areas of econometric theory (including time-series analysis), applied econometrics and economic theory/mathematical economics. Invited addresses will be given by Professors Peter Phillips (Yale), Ken Wallis