

My experience has included direction of a Bureau of Social Research in Pittsburgh concerned with problems of population growth, urban development, health and welfare; service as full-time secretary-treasurer of the American Statistical Association and participant in numerous conferences and committee activities involving the improvement and coordination of statistical data; membership on the Central Statistical Board; director of statistical services in the War Production Board and the War Manpower Commission; operations analysis on the staff of the Army Air Force Evaluation Board in Europe; membership on the Board of Trustees of the Rand Corp. (which is an organization that pioneered in the greater use of mathematical and related techniques in the solution of new problems in the defense of our country); and independent statistical consulting for various private organizations, business firms, and government agencies.

From this wide-ranging experience in the production and use of statistical data I can summarize the major lessons I have learned in the following conclusions:

(1) Citizens of our great country have been well served by the statistical work of agencies of the Federal, State, and local governments. Individuals and families, as well as businesses and community enterprises, have benefited greatly from the use of statistical data. Statistical information about conditions and trends provided a foundation for better plans and provisions to meet their needs and to regulate the administration of services starting a century ago with marketing farm products and with sanitation, public health measures, streets and highways, and various municipal services. The beneficial uses of statistics have progressed in our time to medical research, prevention of economic depressions, efficient management of both public and private enterprises, and innumerable other phases of our national life.

(2) Public confidence is essential to the job of obtaining reasonably complete and accurate data of any sort. People rather remarkably do provide information generously even when they do not see any direct benefit to themselves. Nonetheless, the burden of requests for information falls heavily on some respondents. Over the years they have had good reasons to complain.

I might interpolate that in 1938 I was executive secretary of a committee of the Central Statistical Board that looked into the burden of paperwork and requests for data. Subsequently there have been other reviews, notably by the statistics users of the burden of reporting.

Now there is a wave of alarm at certain illegal or unethical practices which are not employed in statistical work but which threaten to undermine the readiness of individuals to provide statistical information. Statisticians have observed the same ethical standards that physicians and lawyers recognize in respect to confidential information and will continue to do so, since we are aware in our own lives of the importance of privacy and we know that only by safeguarding data obtained for statistical purposes can we continue to get the cooperation of those who report it to us. New and stronger steps must be taken to assure the public of the integrity of these safeguards and the protection of what is private and confidential.

(3) Many advances and improvements have been made in the statistical work of the Federal Government and many more are yet to be realized. It is difficult to resolve conflicting interests and to accomplish what clearly is desirable. In part this is due to resistance from