

STATISTICS

Soviet Population Puzzle

Census expert says statistics from behind iron curtain are true, but complains that they are presented piecemeal, making them difficult to analyze.

► POPULATION FIGURES from behind the iron curtain are a headache to the experts who try to make use of them.

The figures themselves are not falsified, U. S. census experts found. But they are presented in a piecemeal fashion that makes them hard to interpret or compare with one another. And they are often presented in a way that seems intended to confuse or misinform, Drs. Norman Lawrence and W. Parker Mauldin of the U. S. Bureau of the Census reported to the Population Association of America meeting in Princeton, N. J.

If the iron-curtain countries were releasing falsified data to deceive the non-Communist world or to sell the Soviet system, this would require a system of double book-keeping, Dr. Lawrence explained to the meeting. They certainly would not want to deceive their own planners.

In four years of work in trying to make sense of the iron curtain data, the experts found no evidence that figures exported to the rest of the world differ from those for internal consumption.

Where American experts are hampered is in lack of background information on how the data were collected and what they include.

For example, a statement in Pravda on Oct. 19, 1954, said that the "mortality rate declined in 1953 compared with 1940 by 51%." Elsewhere, the rate for 1953 was given as 8.9 per thousand.

A former responsible employee of the Ukrainian Central Statistical Office has told American experts that in her time death certificates for slave labor camp inmates were tabulated separately and never included in the figures released for publica-

tion. Were they taken into account in figuring the Soviet crude death rate? Experts can only guess.

No one here, and few within the Soviet Union, know either the number of slave laborers or their crude death rate. Dr. Lawrence figures that if there were 8,000,000 slave labor camp inmates in 1953 and they had a crude death rate of 50 per thousand, the crude death rate for the U.S.S.R. would be about 10.5 instead of 8.9. So it would seem that they were left out, although it was presumably the intention of the Soviet authorities to have people believe the death rate applied to the entire population.

When Communist data are deliberately falsified, it appears to occur on a local level and is intended to deceive the authorities themselves. Indeed, such falsification is complained of by Soviet publications which urge statistical workers to "report to the appropriate prosecuting and police officials all such cases they find."

Sometimes the false figures are a help to American statisticians, however.

The school officials of Akmolinsk oblast were taken to task for falsifying school enrollment records to show the number of children supposed to be enrolled instead of the actual number. The faked figures were undoubtedly intended to cover up shortcomings in the local school system, Dr. Lawrence explained. But statisticians this side of the iron curtain can get a much better estimate of the school-age population from the faked figures than they could from actual school enrollments.

Science News Letter, June 4, 1955

PUBLIC SAFETY

Would Blueprint Burn Care for Mass Disaster

► PLASTIC SURGEONS should prepare blueprints for the care of burn casualties and make the blueprints available to hospitals all over the country as preparation for mass disaster, Dr. George F. Crikelair of New York declared at the meeting of the American Association of Plastic Surgeons in Washington.

Dr. Crikelair, now assistant attending surgeon at Presbyterian Hospital, New York, was a Naval lieutenant at the time of the Bennington explosion on May 26, 1954. He was sent to the U. S. Naval Hospital at Newport, R. I., to help treat the most severely burned sailors from the aircraft carrier.

Besides Dr. Crikelair, doctors from the

Naval Hospital at Bethesda, Md., shuttled back and forth by plane during the emergency period, bringing in stored dried skin and other supplies and carrying out extensive blood chemistry and radioactive isotope studies.

The exposure method of treatment, with burned areas left unbandaged, was used with all patients. This necessitated inspection of the burned areas two or three times daily, but avoided time-consuming changes of bandages.

Starting nine days after the disaster, 26 skin grafting operations were performed on the 21 most serious burn cases, with as many as four men grafted in a single day. Sometimes the tedious job of grafting skin onto a hand took an entire morning, Dr. Crikelair said, and the skin grafting of a face often took most of a day. Skin for some of the operations was secured from the men's own lower abdomens and buttocks.

Science News Letter, June 4, 1955

ASTRONOMY

Supernova Discovered In Distant Galaxy

► DISCOVERY OF a supernova, a star that suddenly blazes forth with 100,000,000 times its former brilliance, was announced by Harvard College Observatory, Cambridge, Mass.

The spectacular object is in the constellation of Serpens, the serpent, now visible in the southern sky. Despite the supernova's extreme brightness, its magnitude is only 14, too faint to be seen without a large telescope.

If the newly discovered object were placed at a distance where the sun would be barely visible to the unaided eye, it would appear four times as bright as the full moon.

The supernova was spotted by Dr. Hans Haffner of Hamburg Observatory, Bergedorf, Germany. News of its discovery was cabled to Harvard College Observatory by Miss Julie M. Vinter-Hansen of the University Observatory, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Science News Letter, June 4, 1955

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