Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Yes, let's abolish the census [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Thursday 5 September 2013

Danny Dorling is bemoaning the decision to abandon the census [3]:

> It is only because the census is our most accurate count of the population that we can tell, using it, whether mortality rates, university admission rates, employment rates or almost any other rates are rising or falling for particular groups in particular parts of the country over time. In calculating rates the numerators tend to be more reliably measured: deaths registered, students enrolled, or paying jobs in these three cases. Errors tend to be greater in the denominators, the population estimates. The census counts, corrected for estimates of under-enumeration, are the best denominators we have. An ID card system that relied on people being compelled to register their place of residence would be more accurate, but also far more intrusive. The most important task of the decennial census is in updating annual population estimates for small areas to remove systematic bias so that a huge number of studies and also funding calculations can be enacted.

We would expect Dorling to bemoan this for of course he's a social geographer. This is the very meat and drink of life to him.

However, Dorling is also something of a lefty (no, really, no kidding, he is) and like most of the English such he cannot abide knowing that something is going on somewhere without there being some government plan to make everyone do that thing in the approved manner. Which is why he insists that we should continue to do the census so that he and his mates can have the detail they desire to run our lives for us.

At which point we should remember the wisdom of Sir John Cowperthwaite out in Hong Kong. He refused to allow the compilation of GDP statistics on the grounds that some damn fool would only try to do something with them.

We also know that, as Hayek pointed out, the centre can never have sufficient information to be able to plan our lives for us. That census does give them the illusion that they do though. So, a very good reason for abandoning the census is so that no one does have, or even thinks they have, sufficient information to plan both the national and personal lives of us all. Another way to put this is that if they can't see any problems then they won't have any damn fool problems to try and solve them.

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