December 9, 1938

Dear Professor Wilson,

Thank you for your valuable letter of November 25th, and for offering to support Yates's candidature for the International Institute. I have, however, sent his form in in advance, since I heard, rather late, that no more than 5 names can be printed in support.

I agree very considerably with what you say about the Institute, though, looking through the English list, I do not think that official and administrative statistics are at all underrepresented – though perhaps the Dominions may be.

I am glad to hear what your Central Statistical Board is doing. It is an institution which we should do well to imitate. So far as I can make out, and it is difficult to see far in a fog, our national statistics are, as a whole, very chaotic, although many important departments provide themselves with excellent material for their own guidance. The way the question of registration is now being discussed is typical of what I mean. It would be possible, I think, to compile a list of nearly 100 special
registers, kept by different departments for different purposes, e.g., vaccination, school attendance, employment bureaus, pensions of various sorts. The ordinary citizen gets his name and address and various other particulars entered on to between 20 and 50 of these in the course of his life and death. There is no machinery for the collation of these different registers, and the official of one department may or may not know how to obtain access to the information in registers not under his own hand. Probably we shall now have a new register for National Service in addition to those of voters, householders, rate-payers, etc. It would, so far as I can see, cost little and lay the foundations for considerable savings if, at the 1941 census, registrars entered the particular obtained on permanent card-indexes, serving as a central register and giving references to other registers on which more detailed particulars for special purposes are obtainable. If such a system had been in use for 50 years 9/10ths of the questions which a registrar now asks, e.g., at marriage or birth registration, would be already answered in the facts before him, and age at marriage, or type of employment of father at birth registration, would be freed from a great deal of mis-statement. All that I
should require of the citizen would be, under a trifling fine, to notify change of address (this would, in most cases, be done for him by house agents), so that his card could be passed on to his new registrar.

It is easy to see how such local registers, our ordinary registration district only contains 10-20,000 persons, would facilitate the work of local officials, such as school attendance officers, who would not need to obtain their basic information de novo.

Yours sincerely,