

Autumn/Winter Directive 1993

Part 1: Managing Money

Imagine a historian working fifty years on from now in the year 2043 on the question of money. He or she will no doubt see references in the media to a deep economic recession affecting the whole of the UK in the early 1990s.

We can assume that obtaining the facts and figures about the current economic climate will be relatively easy, but what else would you want to put on record about how the situation affects you and people you know? What do the news bulletins on the economic health of the country mean to you? How do they relate to your everyday life? In what ways are you affected by the recession?

As always we are interested in a combination of your own experience, your observations of the world around you and your opinion on the topic. You can reply to this directive in your own preferred way, revealing as much or as little about your personal circumstances as you choose. The more detail you are able to provide which is based on immediate experience, the more valuable your reply. And if you don't have much to say on the subject, please write a few lines explaining your feelings rather than not reply at all.

Some guidelines to be used if it helps to get you writing:

Your personal and/or family situation: it would help if you explained how you budgeted in your household, recording where your income comes from, and who decides how it is to be used. If you feel you want to omit precise details, please note that down so we know it hasn't just slipped your mind.

Perhaps you could start by describing different sorts of income, benefits, salaries, investments, rents, second jobs, sales, presents, loans etc. Does anyone in your household take the main responsibility for the finances? Do you/they keep records of your finances? If so, please describe.

Describe different sorts of basic outgoings: bills for services like gas, electricity, phone, rent, mortgage, food, clothing. Expenses in relation to health and/or education, entertainment, travel, holidays, charitable donations, leisure activities, political or religious activities?

Do you think of somethings as essential and some things as luxuries or optional? Please describe what they might be and why. If you celebrate Christmas, perhaps you could note down how you will handle the extra costs this year.

What have been the significant changes in your financial situation in the past, say, 10 years. Why have they occurred? Would you say you were better off now, or worse off? How have you adapted to these changes? What are your hopes/expectations for the future?

In what ways do you think the recession has affected people (including yourself): how do the major national or international events translate into everyday life? Do you follow the financial news in the newspapers, or on TV and the radio?

Do you obtain help and advice, about your finances? For example, from friends? family? from your union? workplace? bank manager, building society? accountant? other professionals? from books & leaflets? consumer organisations?

What do think of the present government's economic policy, specifically in relation to your own experience and your observations of how people you know are managing?

What do you think about the proposal to introduce VAT on fuel? on books? on newspapers? on children's clothes?

Please turn over

Part 2: Birth *(start new page please)*

This section is about both being born, - an experience we all share but presumably few of us remember - and giving birth. It is always helpful if you provide plenty of background detail, including changes in attitudes and practices (your own and other people's) over the years.

Being born: What do you know about the circumstances of your own birth? Has your mother spoken to you about it? Did you learn much from other people about the event? It would be useful if you noted down the year you were born and whether it was at home or in hospital - or somewhere else!

Other births: Can you recall other births in your past? Perhaps of your siblings, your children or grandchildren? What do you remember? Have you ever attended a birth? Whose was it, and how come you were there? What was it like? Stories please!

What is the best birth you've ever heard about? And the worst?

I won't prompt you more on this but I do hope that both men and women Mass-Observers will feel equally inspired to write.

Giving birth: Please note down details of your own experiences (years that babies were born, place etc.). Who attended the births? What kind of experiences were they, and, if you have several children, how did each birth differ? Fathers or other members of families closely involved in a birth should also feel free to answer this section.

Did you prepare in any special way? For example, take advice from friends & family, from midwives and doctors? from books and magazines? Did you attend classes? How much did you know in advance, and how useful was it when you came to the big event?

Did you make a report of any of your births, take photos, make a video? Have you spoken to your children about their births?

What was your experience of the medical people who helped you?

Was your experience of giving birth easy or difficult and painful? Were painkillers any help? Were there any problems? If you feel able, please record any experiences of still birth or miscarriage.

What was it like after the birth? If you want to write about adjusting to motherhood/fatherhood, feeding, sleeping, getting back to "normal" life, then please feel free to do so. Your own experience is especially valuable, but please also feel free to talk more generally about your opinions on these questions and any insights you've had from discussions with other people.

Part 3: "Mass-Observation"

I was talking about this project at a conference in September this year, when a member of the audience commented that the name "Mass-Observation" was horrible and would put people off joining our project. I have grown so used to the title that I find it difficult to think about it objectively. What do you think? What did you think of it when you first heard the term? Has anyone you know been put off from joining by the title?

It was the word chosen by the original team back in 1937, and it remains the proper name of the Archive, but has it passed its "use by" date?

One problem may be that the word "Mass" has changed in meaning over the years. It used to sound more popular and democratic, now we use it to mean the "lowest common denominator": eg mass media, mass production, mass communication. Do those of you who were around in the thirties agree?

Do we need a new title? What could it be? Would it mean we'd lose our historic connection with the past, and does it matter?

