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SPRING DIRECTIVE 1990

Dear Observer,

The theme for Part One of the Spring Directive is the all important one of social divisions in contemporary British society. Mass-Observation works best when people write directly from their own experience and avoid generalisation, so please be as specific as you can in your examples. And please remember, NAME NO NAMES.

For the benefit of newcomers to M-O, let me say again that although Directives seem to be made up of questions, these are not questions which necessarily require simple answers. They're only there to stimulate you. Also, do not think that the topics mentioned are the only ones that interest us. It is very important that you bring in related topics as they occur to you.

PART ONE: SOCIAL DIVISIONS

What follows is not intended to be a comprehensive check-list, it is just to get you going.

Are there some major divisions in your own environment - class, race, gender, religion, 'culture' etc - that invite comment and are typical of contemporary society?

What does it mean to be 'middle-class'? What does it mean to be 'working class'? Do the terms 'upper middle class' and 'lower middle class' correspond to anything in your experience? Please give examples. Can you give local instances of snobbishness?

What sort of behaviour, accent, dress, possessions etc do you associate with high or low social status?

What kinds of behaviour, dress, accent, vocabulary etc do you find embarrassing? Similarly, what kind of behaviour etc makes you feel insecure, because either you feel 'out of place' or 'threatened'? Have you ever felt obliged to drop a relationship because one or other of the parties was 'outclassed' in some way? Do you cross the street to avoid certain types or groups of people?

Could you list the following in order of social status: teacher, lawyer, journalist, pop-star, doctor, TV news-presenter, minister of religion, accountant. Can you explain your rank order?

Imagine that you enter a bus or train. All the window seats are occupied and you must sit next to someone. What thoughts might go through your mind as you make your decision? Whom would you prefer not to sit next to and why? Be honest!

PLEASE TURN OVER

How much do you have regular dealings with people of a different race from your own? Are you in any way at all affected by the difference? How much, would you say, do you encounter real cultural differences and can you describe your feelings in such encounters? How many people of differing race do you meet socially and regularly? Where do you meet?

What about marriage between people of differing (not only racial) background? What about alleged racial discrimination in the churches? What about jokes which assume gender /religious /racial /national characteristics?

Do you always/often/sometimes feel that you belong to a minority in British society, and if so how and in what circumstances? What do you think are your advantages/disadvantages?

Is British society a society of equal opportunity? Does it have built in features that make for discrimination? If you think that there is an Establishment, how would you describe it? Does monarchy and, more generally, the concept of 'royalty', support the continuance of hierarchy and unearned privilege?

Is the plural society with cultural diversity a good thing? Should there be limits on the extent to which differences are tolerated? Ideally, would it be better to have uniformity of language and culture? Is there a 'British character' or 'National identity'? If you think there are, how would you describe either or both? Are there some demands for 'rights' which you think are unfounded or dangerous?

Do you think that any of the following characteristics (or others that you can think of) are particularly notable in certain communities, sections of society, or classes: industriousness, athletic ability, dishonesty, laziness, extravagance, humour, alcoholism, sense of rhythm, sense of fair-play, thrift, honesty, physical strength, sexual appetite, discipline, inhibitedness, aggression, ambition, intelligence, physical beauty, love of children, indiscipline, uninhibitedness ...

PART TWO: A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE EIGHTIES

(Please remember to start your answer to Part Two on a new sheet of paper).

The end of the 1980s has inevitably produced a lot of media retrospectives. How do you look back on the decade? What do you think have been the most significant events, issues, changes? In your own life, what have been the most important changes since 1980?

Apologies to WOMAN'S HOUR for 'Women's Hour' in the last Directive. Not my

fault! (Mine - sorry - Dorothy).

Some people are not including with their reports a separate scrap of paper with their name and address on it. Please do. It speeds up the processing no end and is then destroyed. And PLEASE don't use staples.

David Pocock

[Dir.31 12.2.90]

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