

Mass-Observation in the 1990s

## Summer 1992 Directive

### Nature and the Environment

This directive asks you for your views about environment and development issues. 1992 is the year when the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (known as the "Earth Summit") takes place in Rio de Janeiro during the first two weeks of June.

This directive has three main aims: (1) to ask you to express your feelings about the environment and development, (2) to ask you to describe how you find out about these issues; and (3) to ask you what you think can or should be done about such issues, if anything. If you don't feel able, for whatever reason, to answer this directive, or you can only answer briefly, could I ask you please to write and explain why. We would rather have a brief note of your reaction than no response at all.

Please answer the first two sections as soon as the directive reaches you but we would like you to wait until after 17 August to answer Section 4 (see page 4). You may like to take your time over Section 3. Please send in your reply to all four sections of the directive together (to save on postage) after 17 August.

#### Some helpful definitions

You should feel free to define what you mean by the words 'environment' and 'development'. They can both cover a wide range of issues, but we thought it might help to get you thinking if we suggested some definitions:

**'Environment'** is simply the place where we live, our habitat, whether it is in the sense of our own neighbourhood, town, or country, or the planet as whole.

**'Environment issues'** include such well-publicised matters as atmospheric pollution, conservation of flora and fauna, ocean ecology, nuclear energy and radioactive waste, the thinning of the ozone layer, transportation and its impact, the introduction of toxic chemicals into the food chain, the destruction of the rain forests, the effect of environmental changes on climate, etc.

**'Development'** is a broad term which generally refers to the process by which a society or country expands economically. It is often taken to mean a progressive improvement in the standard of living. Historically the term 'development' has been associated with what used to be called 'Third World' countries (with the United States axis as the First World and the USSR axis as the Second World). 'Third World' countries were typically 'pre-industrial' or in the early stages of industrialisation, and later they become known as 'developing countries'. Increasingly, however, 'development' is recognised as a process in which all societies are engaged and today the more common distinction is between the rich countries of the 'North' and the poor countries of the 'South'.

**The issues and problems relating to development** are also well publicised. They include malnutrition and under-nutrition, poverty, famine, debt and aid, public health provision, population growth, use of energy resources etc. Again, the list is long and interconnected.

This directive has been written in collaboration with Professor Colin Lacey, Dr John Abraham and Mr David Longman of the Institute of Continuing and Professional Education (Sussex) and Dr Peter Dickens of the Centre for Urban and Regional Research (Sussex).

## Section 1

It would help us a great deal if you could continue the practice of putting your sex, your age, your occupation (not just 'retired' but your previous occupation) and your town or village of residence on the top right hand side of the first page under your M-0 number.

Apologies to those of you who will have already provided the information in Section 1 in some form or other already. Please bear in mind that the researchers will be looking exclusively at this set of replies. We also have been joined by some new Mass-Observers who haven't yet provided this information.

1. What newspapers (weekday and Sunday), journals or magazines do you read?
2. What are your main reasons for choosing them?
3. What current affairs/news television programmes do you watch?
4. List any environmental development organisations of which you are a member.

## Section 2

**Please complete the following section as soon as you receive the Directive**

Recently the 'Earth Summit' took place in Rio di Janeiro. Even if you didn't hear about it, we would still like you to carry on answering where you can. Your views on the environment and media coverage of the environment and development issues are still very important to the success of this Directive.

1. The Earth Summit assumed that there are substantial environmental and development problems in the world. Do you agree?
2. Did you know about this event before receiving this Directive? If you did, what were your main sources of information?
3. Did you take a close interest in the event or would you have done so if you had known more about it?
4. What in your view were the main issues addressed by the conference?
5. Of all the sources of information available to you about the Summit which do you feel is the most reliable and trustworthy? Which is the least?
6. Do you have an opinion as to why these differences in reliability exist?
7. Do you feel that the press could have been more informative? Do you feel that television could have been more informative?
8. Do you think that there are any issues that were neglected by (a) the press and (b) television?

9. Has the coverage of the Earth Summit changed the way that you think or do things about these issues?

### Section 3

The next set questions are designed to get you thinking - and writing - but please feel free to answer them according to your own ideas of what is important and relevant. You may find them difficult at first, so don't agonise too long over your replies. Sometimes odd thoughts and 'gut reactions' are as significant as carefully thought through essays. If you feel you can't answer any of the questions, please say so and explain why. We'd rather have a short explanation of this kind than no reply at all.

#### 1. Nature and 'the natural'

We hear much nowadays about people's relationship to nature. But what does 'nature' really mean?

Should people see themselves as part of nature? Are people just another 'natural' species?

Similarly, the word 'natural' is very common. Many foods (muesli, for example) are now advertised as 'natural'.

Given that most 'natural' products are now produced in factories, does the word 'natural' have any useful meaning?

#### 2. Nature and the Supernatural

Many people believe that nature was created by an all-powerful God or deity. Some also think that it is still controlled by supernatural forces. If we are subject to such forces it may be that the human race can do little to influence or change the non-human world. Perhaps we should surrender to fate?

Does the idea of nature carry any particular religious significance for you?

If so, do you think it worth changing our behaviour in order to protect resources and other species?

#### 3. Identifying issues and problems

What in your opinion are the three most important environmental problems facing the world today? What are the three most important development problems?

Do you think future generations will face the same issues or will there be others that are more important for them?

Do you feel any of these problems pose a threat to you personally or to our way of life in the UK?

Or are they only relevant to remote areas of the world?

Do you feel that these problems are given too much or too little emphasis in what you read in the press or watch on television. Why do you think this is so?

Are environmental and development issues important enough to influence your choice of newspaper. If so, do you think there is an adequate choice available?

#### 4. What can we do about environment and development problems?

What do you think that people can do about these problems?

What sort of things do you do in your daily life that take environment or development issues into account.?

Do you think that individual action is the key to solving these problems?

Do you think it will require co-ordinated action by government or organisations such as the United Nations?

Do you think that richer societies such as Britain, USA and Japan should take more responsibility for these problems when they occur in poorer societies?

Would you be prepared to accept a lowering of your standard of living if this contributed to the solution of these problems?

if you are a member of any environment/development organisation can you explain what led you to become involved?

#### 5. How useful is modern science?

We are still very dependent on scientists to tell us about the environment, our relationship with it and changes to our behaviour if we are going to protect the planet. Does modern science have an adequate understanding of our relationships to the environment?

How seriously should we take the explanations, predictions and proposals offered by modern scientists?

#### Section 4

**Please complete the following section during the week beginning 17 August**

It is now two months since the Earth Summit conference in Rio.

1. Do you feel that it has had an effect on the way governments or powerful organisations behave?
2. Are there any issues that you feel more strongly about as a result of the conference?
3. Are any of the issues raised by the conference still in the public mind? If so, can you say what they are?
4. Do you feel that the press has provided adequate coverage of the issues since the conference took place? What issues does the press concentrate on?
5. Do you feel that television has provided adequate coverage of the issues since the conference took place? What issues does television concentrate on?
6. Do you think this directive has increased your interest/awareness of the issues it covers or would you have been interested anyway?

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