

## **Stencilled Occasional Paper**

MASS OBSERVATION - A SHORT HISTORY

by

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by

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PREFACE.

This paper was originally prepared, in January, 1978, for a seminar at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. During the summer of 1977, I spent many hours in the Mass-Observation Archive, reading the Day Survey Diaries of 1937 and the 'life histories' of the 1939 Observers in connection with a wider project on the London lower middle class between the wars. It was clear that an adequate discussion of the diaries and life histories was impossible without some understanding of Mass-Observation as a whole and I therefore attempted to write a narrative history of the organisation and to set it in the context of the 1930's and 1940's. The following paper is the result. There are some serious lacunae in the account, most notably in Part I, where a discussion of the state of academic sociology and anthropology in the 1930's and a fuller analysis of the interests of the founders of M-O in surrealism and psychology would be helpful. I would welcome any criticisms and suggestions readers may have to offer on these and other points arising from the paper.

The writing of this paper would have been quite impossible without the unfailing help and kindness of Dorothy Wainwright, Secretary of the Mass-Observation Archive. To her I owe especial thanks. I am also grateful to the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive, with whose permission this paper is published. Should readers wish to know more about the Archive, they should contact Dorothy Wainwright at the Mass-Observation Archive, Arts Block D, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, Sussex.

Tom Jeffery  
December, 1978.

## INTRODUCTION

In September 1936 an article appeared in the New Statesman by Geoffrey Pike, a Cambridge school master, commenting on the power of what he called a "myth" in national politics.<sup>1</sup> The Abdication Crisis prompted Pike to write again to the New Statesman suggesting that there was a need for an anthropological study of British society. In his December letter he wrote:

"Anthropologists and psychologists all over the world are studying the reactions of primitive tribes to sexual situations. There has been concentrated within the last ten days the reactions of the people of the British Empire to a sexual situation. Here, in a relatively limited form, is come the material for that anthropological study of our own situation of which we stand in such desperate need".<sup>2</sup>

The Abdication Crisis is the immediate cause of the founding of M-O, illustrates three of Mass-Observation's fundamental concerns. Firstly, a fascination with what they called myth and superstition in national life, especially in relation to public fears and fantasies about the coming of war and relation to royalty. Secondly, a deep distrust of the press, and criticism of the inability of the press to fulfill its supposed function, that is, to bridge the gap between rulers and ruled, to tell the public of the moves and thoughts of its elected leaders and to tell the leaders of the opinions of the electorate. During the Abdication Crisis the press had imposed self-censorship, pages had been torn out of foreign magazines before they reached the public, the Prime Minister, Baldwin, was publicly silent until the eve of abdication: the public wanted the facts and got nothing but rumour. Conversely, Baldwin and his government were worried about public reaction to the crisis. The war in Spain had broken out earlier that year and the government was loathe to encourage the formation of a faction of the King's Friends.<sup>3</sup> The government needed, therefore, to be able to gauge public opinion, but the organs which should have expressed public opinion, the press, were seriously out of touch with their readership. This brings us to the third fundamental concern of Mass-Observation: the great gulf of ignorance dividing rulers from ruled, class from class. In February 1937 M-O wrote:

"As a result of the Abdication Crisis.... we realised as never before the sway of superstition in the midst of science. How little we know of our next door neighbour and his habits. Of conditions of life and thought in another class or district our ignorance is complete. The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream."<sup>4</sup>

At the time of the Abdication Crisis Tom Harrisson had recently returned from an anthropological expedition to the New Hebrides and had settled in the Lancashire cotton town of Bolton to begin an anthropological survey of the English working class. Harrisson was born in 1911 in South America, the son of a General in the British Army turned managing director of the Argentinian railways. He was sent home to England to be educated at Harrow and, in the school holidays, stayed with a series of foster families; there are important similarities in Harrisson's early life to that of George Orwell and they, along with Raymond Williams' ideas on Orwell's lack of close family ties and of a sense of an England of which he



was fully part, should be born in mind in looking at M-O.<sup>5</sup> Further we should remember when looking at Harrisson's later work in Bolton, that by his early 20's, he was a nationally known ornithologist with two studies to his name, one of which used a team of 1000 nationwide observers and both of which were recognised as classics in their field. The study of birds in their natural environment requires endless patience; the ornithologist must observe every aspect of the bird's existence; above all the observer must not be observed. While at Harrow, and while very briefly at Cambridge, Harrisson took part in naturalist's expeditions to the Arctic, Lapland, and St. Kilda. In 1931 he led an Oxford University expedition to Borneo to study plant and animal life and from there moved on to Malekula in the New Hebrides and lived for two years among cannibals. He returned to England in 1936, although his original intention had been to take up Douglas Fairbanks Senior's offer and become a consultant on cannibals in Hollywood. In England he published an anthropological account of his two years in Malekula, Savage Civilisation, a book which became a best seller and later, somewhat surprisingly, became of Left Book Club choice.<sup>6</sup>

Early in January 1937, Charles Madge, a moderately well known leftist poet and a frustrated journalist on the Daily Mirror took up Pike's idea of an anthropology of ourselves. In a letter to the New Statesman<sup>7</sup> he wrote that a group of poets, painters and documentary film-makers, based in Blackheath, London, had already formed an organisation which intended to create a new science of ourselves, Mass Observation. Quite by chance, on the same page of the same issue of the New Statesman, there appeared a long poem, written by Tom Harrisson, on the culinary habits of South Sea cannibals. Harrisson saw Madge's letter and wrote to the Blackheath group, telling them of his Bolton, or, as he always called it, Worktown project. The result was that on the 30th of January 1937, a further letter appeared in the New Statesman signed by Tom Harrisson, Humphrey Jennings, and Charles Madge, formally announcing the foundation of Mass-Observation.<sup>8</sup> The letter lamented the lack of a science of everyday life in modern society. There were, they wrote, sciences of primitive man, economic man, abnormal man, but the chaos of the past year necessitated a new science, a science of ourselves. The founders of M-O called for volunteers to contact them and suggested topics for investigation, the list, like the various interests of the founding members, suggests the eclecticism and the vagueness of the initial conception of M-O; topics ranged from such serious matters on the begavidiur of people at war memorials and anti-semitism to suggested studies of bathroom behaviour, beards, armpits, and eyebrows, and the shouts and gestures of motorists.

Mass Observation sprang, therefore, from a realisation that ordinary people were being mis-led by a complacent press and indifferent government, both deeply ignorant of the needs of working people and the desires of "people of good will." To counteract this situation the people needed to know the facts, about international affairs, government policies, and about themselves; only if the people were given the facts could democracy work. In this sense, M-O was a political challenge of the man in the street, of us against them; it was a populist demand, that democracy should mean what it says, rule by the people, appraised of the facts. M-O originated with the Abdication Crisis of the 1936 but it stepped into the centre of populist politics following the Munich crisis of September 1938. M-O was part of the articulation of a popular consciousness which

would make its greatest impact in the early years of the war but it also links that "war radicalism" to the later 1930's.

I think it would be as well, at this point, to outline the general plan of the paper. Part 1, 'The Need to Know', sets Mass-Observation in the context of the late 1930's. There are four sub-sections to Part 1. Sub-section 1, 'Social Investigation Between the Wars' (pages 5 - 8), looks at social survey, problem surveys, market research and public opinion polling. Sub-section 2, (pages 8 - 12), examines the nature of the crisis of the late 1930's. 3. (pages 12 - 18), looks at organisations which attempted to meet the public's demands for 'the facts' and pays particular attention to the Left Book Club, while Sub-Section 4 (pages 18 - 20) looks at the documentary movement.

Part II (pages 21 - 49) is a chronological history of Mass-Observation itself, starting with 1., (pages 21 - 22) a description of the organisation's first year's work. Part II of the paper then goes on to look at 3., (pages 26 - 28), the Worktown and Holiday Project, 1937 - 1939, 4., (pages 28 - 31), The Day Surveys and the Mass-Observers themselves, and 5., (pages 31 - 37), Mass-Observation and the Munich Crisis. Subsection 6 (pages 37 - 44) looks at Mass-Observation's activities during the war, while Sub-section 7 (pages 44 - 46), attempts to assess M-O's contribution to war-time radicalism and to account for the organisation's eventual absorption into the mainstream of British political, economic and cultural life. Sub-section 8 (pages 46 - 49) examines Mass-Observation's struggle to survive in the post-war world.

PART I. THE NEED TO KNOW.

1. Social Investigation between the Wars.

Mass Observation developed out of a need to know, but the realisation of national ignorance was not peculiar to M-O. Many surveys conducted in the 1920's took the Great War as their reference point. The war had made people revise their ideas of what was possible by way of reform and of what conditions it was impossible to accept as natural. It also formed a convenient divide, across which social conditions could be compared.<sup>9</sup> Before the war, Booth, Rowntree, and Bowley, had introduced new concepts of quantitative exactitude into social survey, concepts which allowed change to be measured with some degree of accuracy over decades. In 1923-4, Bowley made a new survey of the five towns he had studied before the war, Warrington, Northampton, Stanley, Reasing, and Bolton. In 1928 the LSE began its New Survey of London Life and Labour, under the direction of Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, who had himself worked under Booth. In 1936 Seebohm Rowntree repeated his 1901 survey of York, while many new studies of towns and cities were carried out, for example, studies of Bristol, Birmingham, Southampton, and Merseyside.<sup>10</sup>

Like these academic surveys, M-O undertook a detailed study of one town, Bolton, but apart for illustrating the continuing interest in studies of working class life and leisure, for our purpose, the importance of these academic surveys lies in how they differ from M-O. Booth, Bowley and Rowntree, were pioneers of the quantitative approach to social survey; over the years, they developed increasingly sophisticated sampling techniques and established what they considered to be permanent measures of such important social indices as malnutrition and overcrowding."

Despite their claims to scientificity, and their occasional displays of somewhat unreliable statistical tables, such quantitative approaches to social survey were quite foreign to the founders of M-O. Theirs was a religiously qualitative approach, the result of long, careful, unobserved observation. Instead of rigidly categorising people from above they would be part of the people. This brings us to the second major difference between Mass-Observation and the early academic social investigations. The latter's quantitative methods allowed them to make close analyses of the changes in social conditions over 20, 30, or 40 years: their methods necessarily gave them a sense of history. Mass-Observation had no such sense of history. M-O's methods were in any case new, but the methodology of participant observation, of being part of the people, allowed them no historical reference points. Further, M-O had its roots in anthropology and also in a vague surrealism, a search for a "mass unconscious": such concepts were essentially a-historical. The historicity and academicity of the surveys of, for example, Bowley and Rowntree, served, to some extent, to shield the impact of their conclusions. Conversely, the a-historicism of Mass Observation served to popularize and de-academicise M-O, to emphasise its claim to be part of the people, to make it very much involved in the present crisis.

War, and an urge to see if and to what extent social conditions had improved, prompted a growth in social investigation between the wars. The crisis of the early 30's, and its seeming insolubility, gave urgent

impulse to this social investigation, for academic, government, and business purposes. Groups such as the New Fabian Research Bureau, the Pilgrim Trust, and Political and Economic Planning (PEP) produced substantial and even definitive reports on such subjects as unemployment, housing, the health services and the location of industry.<sup>12</sup> Marwick and Addison, among others, have pointed to the importance of such groups in the building of a new centre in British politics, a centre which would come into its own during the Second World War.<sup>13</sup> M-O, too, was to be part of that centre, and was to base much of its war-time criticism on its experience and analyses of the 1930's; importantly, however, M-O, unlike many of the "problem" surveys carried out by political pressure groups, approached the problems from its position as being a part of the people and not from a stand-point of planning from above.

If M-O was close in some respects to academic social surveys and to political problem surveys it was also related to the growth of commercial research organisations. In 1950 Mark Abrams wrote:

"In the USA the veterans of market research can recall substantial surveys carried out 40 or 50 years ago. In Britain, claims that go back more than 20 years are likely to be apocryphal."<sup>14</sup>

The slump presented both a severe challenge and a great opportunity to the suppliers of the domestic consumer market. In some areas spending power was pared to the bone, in other areas domestically oriented consumer industries and consumer spending held the key to recovery. Through the 20's and 30's two separate but closely connected strands of market research developed, and over the period gradually built up methodologies which promised some degree of accuracy. Some of the earliest market research work took the form of readership surveys of newspapers and periodicals, these being, for the most part, a service to advertisers, indicating where advertising campaigns should be placed to reach a particular market, markets which market research sought to designate.<sup>15</sup> Firms specialising in readership surveys would employ teams of interviewers, usually female, and would analyse the results of their surveys by age, class, sex, and region. Techniques were, at first, primitive; for example the earliest readership surveys neglected to weight their samples for class.<sup>16</sup> Such methodological naivety should be born in mind when we later encounter strong attacks from market researchers on M-O's methodology.

Market research organisations themselves also struggled to establish an accurate approach to surveying. Researchers on the ground needed to be tactful, observant, wary, and able to differentiate between types of interviewee. As Lintas put it:

"Every girl must be trained to be consistently alert to catch everything the woman tells her and not to accept anything she is not absolutely sure about."<sup>17</sup>

Social class, a crucially important factor in all market research work was judged by the interviewer on the ground on the basis of the general appearance of the district, the type, age, and size of house, the appearance of interviewee, on the number of servants and the appearance of children.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that there was



considerable room for error in this market research approach (known in the trade as 'quota sampling'), depending, as it did, very much on the judgement of the individual researcher. Later, market researchers would attack M-O for being too lax and subjective. By the late 1930's market research work was being carried out across the whole field of consumer spending, and detailed analyses were being made of consumption of everything from motorcars to nail polish, from margarine to kitchen furniture. By 1936 annual surveys were being published comparing expenditure patterns in different parts of the country and among different classes and age groups.<sup>19</sup> This research would, of course, have been valuable to government and academic social investigators, but, for the most part, it was not intended for the advancement of sociological knowledge. As Lintas put it:

".... it must be admitted that the motive power behind all classifications .... is the assessment of spending power." <sup>20</sup>

A further method of commercial social investigation which was just beginning to appear in Britain at the end of the 30's was public opinion polling. Straw votes have been traced back in the USA to the early nineteenth century and by the twentieth century they were common-place. In the 1936 presidential election a new system of market research quota sampling based-polling was introduced with great success. In 1938 Dr. Gallup opened an office in England, the British Institute of Public Opinion, the exclusive rights to which were bought by the News Chronicle. Little came of commercial public opinion polling in Britain until the post war years.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime M-O made substantial and important investigations of public opinion both before and during the Second World War, using radically different methods. In the highly commercially competitive post-war years the two opposing methods, the quota sampling of the commercial organisations and the in-depth observational approach of M-O, clashed repeatedly.

Most social survey work of the interwar period was carried out by disinterested academics, charitable trusts, political pressure groups, commercial organisations, and 'amateur' bodies; There was very little government work.<sup>22</sup> It was the coming of war which prompted the State to enter the social survey field in earnest. In 1936 the committee on Imperial Defence appointed a sub-committee to report on the measures which would be necessary in the event of food rationing. This sub-committee eventually led to the War-time Family Food Survey, an investigation which, for the next ten years, covered 10,000 households annually. The work itself, however, was carried out by the Research Department of one of the three major commercial research organisations, the London Press Exchange.<sup>23</sup> During the war government became involved in social investigation of all kinds; government's lack of involvement before the war and the far-reaching extent of its involvement during the war is just one more instance of the revolution in government attitudes to social conditions which took place over this period. It was also, of course, a function of the integration into government of those campaigning bodies which had stood outside and criticised government in the 30's and now became part of the new "consensus". M-O was one such body. We shall see later that M-O's relationship with government is crucial to its history. Lack of government involvement with social investigation in the 30's had two determining effects on the nature of M-O before the war. Firstly, lack of government financial support



for social investigation limited M-O's scope: in its early years, it lived from hand to mouth, from day to day. Secondly, the very fact that government seemed to take no interest in the people whom other, ad hoc, bodies were investigating, was one of the *raison d'être* of M.O. Before the war, M-O was distant from government and criticised government for being so distant from the people. In the war, when formerly critical 'middle opinion' became the new centre, M-O would work closely with government, would be financed by government, and would support the reforming schemes of the new centre. It is not so much that M-O moved away from its original base and closer to the centre of power, but that power moved to that centre ground of which M-O was, in a complex and sometimes marginal way, a part.

By 1937, market research, press surveys, social survey and problem investigations were established, powerful means of social investigations. Public opinion polling had just begun. M-O, as we shall see, took a great deal from each form of social investigation. Like previous social survey, it concentrated on one town, like press survey, it was keenly interested in newspaper readership and in public attitudes to the press, like market research, it was concerned with the minutiae of everyday life, like problem investigation, it analysed particular subjects, for example, smoking and gambling, and, like public opinion polling, it attempted to establish what ordinary people really thought. Unlike all these organisations, M-O was determined that this information should be democratically available to all concerned, it was to be a science of ourselves, for ourselves.

## 2. The Crisis of the Late 1930's

M-O can be set, therefore, in the context of a general "need to know" which characterised the interwar period as a whole. But M-O itself was a phenomenon of the late 1930's and came into being in response to a particular kind of crisis. There are many ways of looking at the interwar period; the dominant popular image of the period, as M-O would have put it, is probably that of the slump of 1929-33, of the unemployed on street corners, of the hunger marches. In looking at the history of the middle classes in England between the Wars I have paid particular attention to two crises, the inflationary period following the First World War and the 1929-33 slump. It is now clear to me that it is easy to take the "interwar period" too much for granted, for it was precisely what that phrase indicates, a period between two wars, a period in which no sooner had the memory of one war, the war to end all wars, begun to fade, than the coming of a second war began to seem inevitable. The twenty-one years between Armistice Day of 1918 and the out-break of the Second World War in September 1939, in fact saw three major crises, crises equal in intensity but different in nature. The crises of 1918-24 and 1929-33 were sectional, they hurt some more than they hurt others, but the third crisis of the interwar period, 1936-39, affected all classes with equal intensity, for it was the crisis of the approach of war. We should note here that those people least hard hit by the slump of 1929-33 were precisely those people who were to feel most involved in third crisis of 1936-39, the employed middle classes, schoolteachers, civil servants, laboratory technicians, clerks. It was these people who made up a large proportion of the

'men and women of goodwill' who would play such a major part in the late 30's crisis and in the politics of the coming war. The crisis of 1936-39 was characterised not by class conflict but by a felt need for national unity, a concept likely, for many reasons, to appeal to the middle class. The ideas and policies of the 'new centre', emergent in the 1930's sought to establish such a unity, from both above and below, through a more generous sense of social responsibility and through drawing those whose needs and voices had previously been ignored, towards the centre of power. If the Welfare State and consensus politics of the 1950's and 1960's can be seen as the eventual solution to the crisis of the 1929-33 slump, the crisis of the coming of war can be seen as a major starting point in the determination of the nature of that solution. This latter crisis drew the new middle class towards the centre of national politics. It might be argued that the major beneficiaries of the eventual solution was precisely this new middle class.

It was clear to people in the late 1930's that war would engulf everyone. Total war did not come as a surprise to the people of Britain in 1940, indeed it was considerably less total than many people had feared.<sup>24</sup> Baldwin's notorious remark that 'the bomber would always get through', Churchill's comment that London was 'the greatest target in the world, a kind of tremendous, fat valuable cow, fed up to attract beasts of prey',<sup>25</sup> could not help but spread anxiety throughout the population. In 1938 the Committee on Imperial Defence estimated that Britain would suffer 1.8 million casualties in the first two months of the war. 20 million square feet of timber would be needed for the coffins and, as this was an impossible figure, mass graves should be dug. By 1938 it was estimated that 175,000 people in London alone would die in the first 24 hours of war. J.B.S. Haldane toured Left Book Club groups warning that aircraft would machine gun refugees as they fled down arterial roads out of London, the bombers would glide over England to prevent early detection, the noise of the bombings would deafen survivors for life. Air attacks would be the ultimate human disaster and it was likely that the bombs would be accompanied by poison gas. There would be no escape. How far the public heeded these warnings, which had been voiced since the 1920's is difficult to tell, but it is inconceivable that they would have failed to instil a widespread fear, a fear which, while hopes for peace via collective security remained, could be pushed to the back of the mind. By 1937 collective security was effectively a dead letter. It was the task of M-O to analyse public attitudes to the coming of war and to break through the fantasy surrounding air attack to the true facts.

1936 was the turning point, the year in which public attention turned from domestic concerns to the wider problems of the world. In 1940 George Orwell wrote:

"I don't quite know in what year I first knew for certain that the present war was coming. After 1936, of course, the thing was obvious to anyone except an idiot."<sup>26</sup>

The Jarrow Marches and the Battle of Cable Street were last flickerings of the domestic crisis of the early 1930's. A new King was on the throne, the BUF was a spent force and some form of recovery was underway. Abroad, however, 1936 saw the Occupation of the Rhineland, victory for Mussolini in the Abyssinian War, the

the founding of the Rome-Berlin Axis, the signing of the German-Japanese Pact, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. On the 31st December 1936 the Daily Telegraph wrote in a leader:

".... 1936 will not be memorable by the magnitude of its actual catastrophes. But it has abounded in events which have seemed to bring castastrophe near. Serious alarms at home, graver alarms abroad, a deepening sense of gathering storm, feverish military, naval and aerial preparations, revolution and civil war have kept Europe continually on tenter hooks." 27

The war in Spain was important as both a beginning and an end. For some, most notably the poets who had made their names in the early 1930's and the Marxist left a few years younger than the Auden group, it was the great testing ground of their analysis of the course of development of the 1930's. The war seemed to be a clear battle of good against evil, of the left against Facism. The war was, on the surface, a test of commitment: here the choice between art and action was real. But Spain posed deep and complex problems. There was the problem of observation, recording, bias, the problem of how to tell the truth about war in general, about the cause of good against evil, and about the complicated political and moral entanglements of the war. And there was the further problem of facing both personal and political defeat; many felt unable to take a full part in the war, many were unwilling to tell the liberal truth about Communist Party involvement, especially at a time when rumours of the Moscow trials were beginning to leak out. All, eventually, had to accept the defeat of the Republic. Spain saw the deaths of major British Marxist writers, Fox, Cornford, Caudwell, and it also saw the beginning of the end of commitment of the Auden generation of poets. How far these writers had really been involved in politics is a moot point. Certainly in comparison with the last generation of 30's activists, the documentarists, their contact with political life and with the working classes, was minimal. Yet it is clear that by 1937, as Hynes has written, "there was a general withdrawal from action evident among English intellectuals, as they came to see no alternative to waiting for the end" 28 Julian Symons has put it thus: "After Spain, and indeed before the end came in Spain, there was little left of the 30's movement but a feeling of resignation and a sense of guilt." 29

But Spain was also a beginning. Firstly, many upper middle class intellectuals of the Auden and immediately subsequent generations who had been involved in leftist politics in the early and mid 30's did not lose all political faith, but turned instead to a new kind of political involvement, to what they saw as the true values of the everyday life of the common people in Britain. Julian Trevelyan, writing of the time he spent with M-O in Bolton, and, through Tom Harrisson, with the Ashington Group of working class artists, put it thus:

"I had also through M-O partly resolved for myself the problems that beset all my generation in the years before the war. We watched helplessly the growth of Facism extinguishing, as it seemed, one after another the liberties amongst which we had moved in our carefree way ten years before. The long drawn-out struggle in Spain, the gradual shrinking of the Republican territory where all

our hopes lay-this seemed only symbolic of the betrayal of all that we cared for. Like so many of my friends I had flirted with Communism and had been lured to meetings to hear Pollitt and Ted Bramley; as a Surrealist I had cooked Bomblets and marched in May Day processions; as a member of the Artists International I had signed telegrams and badgered M.P.'s. All this now seemed quite useless, and it was more by way of the enthusiasm of the Ashington miners for their paintings that I regained my faith in the more permanent values of our civilisation that had, so short a while ago, seemed to be running down to its own destruction."<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Spain provided examples, both on the Iberian Peninsula and in other non-Fascist countries, of popular front alliances of "people of goodwill", peoples' fronts against Fascism, the kind of political alliance which called for a little theoretical commitment to working class power, an alliance against something very real and threatening, rather than for an ideal, an ideal which had never been fully visualised. For Spain fascinated more than just left poets and intellectuals. The threat of Fascism brought into politics many with whom liberal goodwill had, in the early 30's, stopped short of the political involvement. These people, a large proportion of them from the lower middle class, now found themselves to be part of a wide political movement designed to stop Fascism.<sup>31</sup>

Spain, therefore, posed problems of observation and record for many outside the small group of liberal-left intellectuals. To concerned people in England, the British Government's attitude to non-intervention seemed quite incomprehensible, and the Government itself never troubled to explain its stance. For many it seemed clear that Non-Intervention meant, to all intents and purposes, tacit support for the Fascist powers.<sup>32</sup> Further, newspaper coverage of Spain was bedevilled with bias, obvious bias in that no-one would expect the Observer, for example, to support the Republic, and a subversive bias, in that many intellectuals and newspaper correspondents were prepared to tell lies about Spain for the sake of a hidden goal. The story of Claud Cockburn, aka Frank Pitcairn, is well known. Koestler, at the time a Comintern agent, posed as a liberal correspondent for the News Chronicle. Another Comintern agent, Kim Philby, was the Times' correspondent with Franco: his fellow journalists believed him to be a keen Fascist.<sup>33</sup> There seemed to be, and to some extent was, a conspiracy against understanding on the part of government, the press, and certain individuals, by means of obscuring the "facts".

If 1936 was the turning point, by 1937 the international situation was rapidly deteriorating. The war in Spain continued, M.P.'s cheered in the House of Commons when British ships were sunk by Fascist submarines in the Mediterranean and in April Guernica was attacked. In July 1937 the Sino-Japanese War broke out again with the Japanese making huge and rapid advances. In Moscow, Marshall Tuchachevsky, the Russian representative at the Jubilee celebrations of George V was sentenced to be shot for allegedly holding secret talks with the German Army.<sup>34</sup> In March 1937 the first gas mask factories were opened in Britain and air-raid sirens were tested for the first time. Throughout the year the British Army was rapidly refurbished and the slogan 'join the Modern Army' appeared.<sup>35</sup> By February, 1938, Eden had resigned as



Foreign Secretary and by March Germany had occupied Austria. In Britain, the response to the worsening international situation took the form of the growth of a popular movement against Fascism but there was also a growing sense of bewilderment with government policy and of anger with press coverage of events. That there was a widely felt need for the articulation of public concern and for the provision of the facts of the situation can be seen in the growth of a number of organisations which took up the general anxiety of the people and moulded it into a populist attack on Government, the press, the 'Old Gang'. These new groups, one of which was M-O, based themselves on that amorphous constituency, 'people of goodwill'.

### 3. THE LEFT BOOK CLUB AND POLITICAL EDUCATION.

Preeminent among such groups was the Left Book Club (LBC), the most successful political and cultural organisation of the late 1930's. It may, therefore, be useful to look at the LBC in some detail and to note the many similarities and the important differences between the LBC and M+O. Announced by Victor Gollancz, John Strachey and Harold Laski in March, 1936, the Club had 6000 members before its first book was published, 20,000 within six months and 57,000 at its peak in April, 1939. By that time there were over one thousand discussion groups linked to the Club, based on work places, suburbs and common interests, such as poetry, drama, rambling and cycling. For 2/6 a month, the Club member received a copy of the monthly book 'Choice', a copy of the Club's journal, The Left Book Club News (later renamed 'Left News'), and could, if he wished, purchase a number of additional books at a reduced price. The main interests of the LBC were foreign affairs - the threat of fascism and the politics of other countries, Spain, China, Russia. Its aims were to encourage the formation of a Popular Front at home, an alliance of all parties and individuals opposed to the National Government and to fascism, and to urge the formation of a Peace Front abroad, an alliance of democracies, primarily Britain, France and the USSR, against Nazi Germany. To all intents and purposes the Club was a 'front' for the Communist Party<sup>26</sup> but it was also particularly attractive to the middle class and was, largely, a middle class organisation.

At the height of the Munich crisis Gollancz wrote:

"The Left Book Club was founded a little over two years ago because some of us understood the nature of the impending catastrophe and were determined to do all in our power to prevent the catastrophe coming. We watched a public ignorant and unaware; we saw decent and politically innocent men and women welcoming as a policy making for peace - the thing for which above all they longed - a stampede in the face of fascist aggression that could only end in universal disaster ... There is nothing more horrible than the deception of the public." <sup>37</sup>

The key to political success was, therefore, not working class solidarity and action but learning and knowledge. Such a formula could not help but appeal to certain sections of the middle class, especially the young, who, having learnt at secondary school to



value education highly, an education which in most cases had been cut off at the age of sixteen, were keen to go on learning. As the Left News asked, why should the LBC not be "a Left Wing University"? 38 Gollancz explained in the first issue of the LBC journal that the Club was designed

"To provide that indispensable basis of knowledge without which a united front of all men and women of good faith cannot be built. If we are to win, we must have, each one of us, not less but more knowledge than the best informed of our enemies." 39

Nor was the rhetoric of the LBC couched in socialist terms. Gollancz aimed at a wider appeal when he addressed the Club throughout the Left News during the Munich Crisis:

"I now plead with you on this September day of 1938, as I have never pleaded before, to work with all your heart and soul to forge the Left Book Club into an instrument of enlightenment which will help - if I may use words which, however worn they may be, carry with them a desperate appeal - to save civilisation." 40

Moreover, the LBC offered its members a crucial choice as to the form their political involvement could take. Membership of the LBC could be strictly private affair, a matter of reading books in one's own home and perhaps corresponding with the Club's head-quarters in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, through the local groups, LBC membership could draw the radically inclined middle class individual out of his political and perhaps social isolation, and put him in touch with others of like mind in a culturally attractive environment, thus creating a new sense of fellowship. A 'Convenor' of a group in Kent, describing himself as 'a University graduate' wrote to Gollancz:

"I joined the Left Book Club in the first month of its existence. I belonged to no political party. My outlook, it is true, was left, but it was a very confused, cynical and disillusioned outlook. But I wanted people to talk to. For various reasons I was sadly in need of intelligent personal contacts. So when the Left News announced that groups were being formed, and invited people to submit their names as convenors, I sent my name in .... I did not expect anything very much. I felt that the most that was likely to happen was that I should get in touch with a few cranky intellectuals like myself .... (The first person to get in contact) .... was in the months to come to give me a new and intensely valuable friendship. For the next six months he and I were thrown together .... and formed a friendship which will, I know, last us both a very long time - and all because of that half-jesting post-card I sent to 14, Henrietta Street. I had offered myself as a convenor simply because I wanted to meet people, not because I wanted to join an organisation, still less because I wanted to run an organisation." 42

When asked why they joined Mass-Observation, many observers replied that they welcomed the chance to participate in a collective intellectual effort, the chance to gain a wider understanding of the crisis through which they were living, the chance to feel part of a wider movement. Some also admitted that they were lonely and

turned to Mass-Observation to get their troubles off their chests through writing diaries. 43

The Left Book Club, therefore attracted many who had not previously been politically active. Membership itself involved no prior knowledge of the complexities of left-wing politics and no test of doctrinal obedience. For the middle class individual moving towards political commitment in the late 1930's, local political parties could seem somewhat forbidding. The Labour and Communist parties seemed to represent a different and difficult political culture. The local Conservative Association was probably dominated either by gentry (urban or rural) or by self-concerned local traders. As likely as not, by the late 1930's, a local Liberal Association did not exist. As John Lewis explained, the local LBC groups

"are of great value, constituting as they do in many cases, practically the only progressive organisation to which people can belong and providing a sufficiently broad basis to make it possible for those to join who cannot as yet, commit themselves publicly to any political party." 44

So it is not surprising that the Club was particularly successful in the suburban areas of London and throughout the relatively prosperous South. The Left News reported, in February, 1937:

"Great activity is to be found in such supposedly reactionary places like Plymouth, Brighton and Bournemouth, which shows what some of us always believed, that the less highly organised the progressive movements in such places, the more hungry souls are eager for a Left organisation to bring them together and break down their isolation. Tom Mann filled the Bournemouth Labour Hall with a crowd of middle class intellectuals and not only did them all good but made them all love him." 45

Members of practically every white-collar occupation, bank clerks, lawyers, social workers, teachers, advertising workers, accountants and many, many more, set up LBC groups, while groups based on working class occupations were conspicuous in their rarity. There was a busmen's group, a railwaymen's group and a print workers' group, but few others.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the activities of the group were likely to appeal more to the middle class individual than to the manual worker. Apart from the very business of talking about books, the social activities of the groups centred around middle class interests. In June, 1937, the Left News reported:

"'Lefts' of Richmond and Kew had felt themselves isolated until the Left Book Club came along and introduced them to one another. Now they are finding that even in this centre of reaction something can be done to rally such progressive opinion as exists. Next month they are trying something new - an evening party 'of a new type' - in an effort to make their influence felt in a wider circle. The 'slogan' of the evening is to be 'Fascism Destroys Culture'. There will be a series of exhibitions illustrating this, a recital of music by composers banned by Fascists, and a dance, in the middle of which will be a solo

by a Spanish dancer and one short political speech." 46

Very much like the Clarion Movement, the Left Book Club attempted to provide a full social, cultural and political life for its members. Rambles and cycle tours were turned to political advantage, the participants meeting up to discuss the Choice of the month over tea and sandwiches. At seaside resorts, LBC groups made holiday makers especially welcome, rather in the manner of churches in such towns boosting their congregations with visitors anxious to hear a different preacher. In the South of England local groups emulated middle class charity organisations, 'adopting' a group of unemployed workers and sending them a copy of the monthly 'Choice'.<sup>47</sup> Special tours of the depressed areas and of the East End of London were arranged.

Other Club activities a good way out of the reach of the financial resources, and, perhaps, of the cultural parameters of the working class, included weekend schools at seaside guest houses, summer schools at a Hertfordshire country house, trips to Russia at prices from £19 5s. for 14 days and ten days Easter holiday on the Riviera, under the aegis of Prospect Popular Front Holidays, including a dinner and reception with a metal workers' trade union in Paris and Popular Front festivities at Nice, all for £7-17-6.<sup>48</sup> At this time the average wage for a manual worker was between £3 and £4 a week.

So, like M-O, the LBC offered the previously politically uninvolved a chance to participate and was, perhaps, more successful than M-O in terms of membership through providing a wide range of cultural and social activities. Both organisations offered a sense of fellowship. But the LBC aimed, further, at creating a wider sense of fellowship, a new sense of national unity. In a crisis in which a felt need for national unity arose from the urgency of the external threat to democracy, a broad-based movement, of which the LBC and M-O were part, sought to establish a new unity of 'the people' in opposition to a government which was fast losing its claim to be 'National'. The LBC set great store by its mass meetings, which were characterised, as Gollancz later put it, by "an extra-ordinary atmosphere of sober enthusiasm".<sup>49</sup> On the platform sat figures calculated to appeal to an uncertain audience, anxious for leadership. Churchmen, non-socialist M.P.'s, academics and writers were given pride of place. Alongside them, Harry Pollitt, Sir Stafford Cripps or Ellen Wilkinson would represent socialism. Only occasionally would a trade unionist appear on the platform. Gollancz explained that such platforms were "truly national": 50

"We alone provide a platform 'above the battle' of party politics, above the battle, even, of the present Popular Front controversy itself: which means that we are in the forefront of the battle for uniting the people of this country ... against War and Fascism, which is to say ... against the National Government." 51

Here, then, was a rhetoric of national unity which was to be used with great effect by radical politicians and commentators in the early years of the War. But the LBC itself did not carry the idea of 'the people' into 'the people's war', for, unlike other components of the radical fact-gathering and fact-disseminating populist movement of the late 1930's, the LBC was inextricably tied to a political party, the Communist Party, and, through the CP, to the actions of the USSR. If the ultimate goal of the LBC was a Peace

Front of Russia, France and Britain, then the ultimate disaster was the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The defeat of Republican Spain dealt a severe blow to morale. In May, 1939, Gollancz noticed 'a widespread feeling of apathy, weariness and disillusion' but tried to lift the Club by appealing for a final effort to force Chamberlain into an alliance with Russia, "which will be a triumph for the Left Book Club which has explained the true meaning of the 'new civilisation' in Russia".<sup>52</sup> Writing in late July, 1939, Gollancz announced that August would be 'emphatically an 'up' month'.<sup>53</sup> On 23rd, August, 1939, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed.

So the War, which, as we shall see, brought Mass-Observation into its own, to all intents and purposes saw the death of the LBC. Gollancz had been wary of the CP link for some time and now vehemently repudiated the CP and its opposition to the War. The whole tenor of the Club changed: it was no longer to be a campaign but instead an open forum for airing different points of view. As the leaders debated angrily with each other as to whether the War was a struggle against fascism or an imperialist attack on socialism,<sup>54</sup> bewildered members wrote for guidance, which was not forthcoming. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that members left in droves. For tentatively committed newcomers to politics the arcane but vitriolic debates on Russia and imperialism seemed irrelevant; for Communists and tough fellow-travellers Gollancz's new hostility to the USSR was too much to bear.<sup>55</sup>

While the Nazi-Soviet Pact and subsequent Communist opposition to the War robbed the LBC of the central focus of its campaign, the Club was further under-mined on a more practical level. Logistically its position was just the opposite of that of Mass-Observation. In the case of Mass-Observation, hundreds of observers sent in reports from wherever they happened to be to a fixed base. The LBC had to distribute books through booksellers, who might well close down or be bombed out, to a constantly shifting public. Perhaps the task would not have been beyond a man of Gollancz's energy had the inspiration still been there. As it was, from 1939 to 1942, the Left Book Club's membership fell from 57,000 to 15,000.

The Club struggled on, commenting in a changed rhetoric and in a now muted voice, on the main issues of War-time politics. The Club now sought to resolve, said Gollancz, 'the twin problem of democracy and leadership' and found the solution in the creation of 'professional citizens'.<sup>56</sup> Gollancz himself turned his attention to more abstract themes, justice, kindness, tolerance, while the Left News, now devoting much of its space to a journal of European emigres, International Socialist Forum, was little more than a solid and worthy news-sheet, quite lacking the zeal and energy of the pre-war days.

There were many similarities between the Left Book Club and Mass-Observation. On a Practical level, both organisations were run by dedicated and extraordinarily energetic people. It was perhaps their energy, their desire to oversee every aspect of their organisations' work, which made both Gollancz and Harrison somewhat authoritarian individuals. Gollancz refused to 'democratise' the LBC, despite considerable pressure from group convenors, while Harrison, especially after the outbreak of war, kept a very tight rein on M-O. Further, both organisations were very vague about their financial circumstances; Club members and Mass Observers would



write to their respective organisations, asking where the money originally came from to set up the ventures and where the money from their subsequent publications went to.<sup>57</sup> Neither organisation published accounts. It seems that Gollancz ploughed all the LBC subscriptions back into the Club. M-O was constantly short of money but it is not surprising that many observers complained when they had to pay 12/6 for the first M-O book they had helped compile, May 12th, when they knew that LBC members received the monthly Choice and a good deal more for 2/6. Gollancz and Harrison were, in the best sense of the term, cultural entrepreneurs; the conditions of the market in the late 1930's, clamouring demand and little rivalry from the established suppliers of news and knowledge, allowed them to succeed. It is difficult to see them doing so at any other time, before or since.

Like M-O, therefore, the LBC was a product of the crisis of the late 1930's; it identified that crisis as the threat to democracy and liberal values posed by fascism; it attacked the established media for failing to provide the man in the street with the facts of the situation; it presented knowledge and understanding as the keys to resolving the crisis and it gave the middle class a previously unavailable chance to participate in that resolution. Both the LBC and M-O were part of a wider movement which would, eventually, succeed in building a new concept of 'national unity', the unity of 'all people of good-will', in opposition to anti-socialist unity, the concept which had prevailed throughout the interwar period and which had been so firmly established at the General Election of 1931.

The LBC and M-O followed similar courses of development. Both started out emphasising their more academic characteristics, the LBC its educational function, M-O its importance as a new science. By the time of the Munich Crisis both organisations had abandoned any pretence of providing disinterested enlightenment and had become highly effective propagandists for the new radicalism. The crucial difference between M-O and the LBC lay in the latter's explicit commitment to politics. Between 1936 and 1939, the LBC was tied to a particular set of issues and to a particular mode of political practice, a connection which gave it a political strength which other components of the radical documentary movement lacked. But this strength proved to be its weakness. The populist radicals came fully into their own during the early years of the War. The LBC, on the other hand, was shattered by its adherence to the CP and the USSR. As we shall see, the radical commentators, among whom should be numbered M-O, propounded a particularly maleable set of political principles. By the later years of the War, after it had done its best to leave its fellow-travelling past behind, the LBC came into line with the main concerns of the radical commentators. As such it was drawn into the new centre of British politics and, in the conditions of the post-war world, along with other components of the radical movement, was subsumed. The Left News ceased publication in March, 1947 and the Left Book Club itself was wound up in October, 1948. In the meantime, the LBC brought a large and increasingly politically significant section of the British people, the lower middle class, into closer contact with politics, politics which, it can be argued, they went a long way towards making their own in the 1940's, 50's and 60's. John Strachey has argued that the LBC "played a considerable part in making possible the Labour victory of 1945",<sup>58</sup> and hence



in facilitating this important shift in the basis of power and personnel in British politics.

The public were not much more enlightened by the Fleet Street press over the deteriorating international situation than they had been over the Abdication Crisis. The press imposed self-censorship for fear of losing confidential government news sources; <sup>59</sup> The Times, in the 1930's was, in any case, virtually an "official" newspaper. This silence on the part of the established press led to the proliferation of ad hoc, unofficial news sources, claiming to reveal to a worried and unenlightened readership the full facts of the complicated international entanglements. The most famous such fact sheet was Claud Cockburn's "The Week", another example being Commander King Hall's "The K.H. Newsletter", the latter obtaining a circulation of some 50,000; there were many others, all publishing stories suppressed or over-looked by the established press. <sup>60</sup> So successful were these amateur organs that the popular press began to run columns entitled, for example, "Inside Info" and "Secret Service". In complete contrast to this popularisation of fact was the growing obsession of the yellow press with horoscopes, <sup>61</sup> an aspect of popular superstition which particularly fascinated M-O.

Another example of this ever-increasing need for facts can be seen in the history of Penguin Books. Founded by Allen Lane in 1935, Penguin introduced its non-fiction series Pelican and its topical reporting series, Penguin Special, in 1937. <sup>62</sup> In 1947 the Conservative Party organised an exhibition, a section of which was entitled "How the People were told a Story". In it, along with Michael Foot and Hannan Swaffer of the Daily Herald, appeared Allen Lane. <sup>63</sup> The pioneer of Penguin Specials was W.E. Williams, Secretary of the Institute of Adult Education, a pillar of the WEA and, from 1941, Director of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. <sup>64</sup> M-O's most successful publication, Britain by Mass-Observation, which contained a stinging attack on Chamberlain, the press and the handling of the Munich crisis, appeared in Penguin Special in 1939.

#### 4. DOCUMENTARY

In 1938, fact finding, fact-presenting journalism entered into direct competition with the established press with the founding of Picture Post. Picture Post was itself part of what has come to be known as "the documentary movement", which, in turn, was part of that wider 'need to know' which so characterised the 1930's. Documentary had been established as a vital, new genre well before the full impact of the crisis of the late 1930's was felt. In 1934, Stefan Lorant, later to found Picture Post, launched a photo-magazine with Bill Brandt as cameraman. Humphrey Spender, brother of Stephen, unable to find work as an architect and who had, therefore, been working as a photographer for an advertising agency, joined the Daily Mirror, then still, primarily, a women's paper, and, in the tracks of Priestley, set out on an English journey, his photographs being published by the Mirror under the name of "Lensman". In the same year William Coldstream and Humphrey Jennings, both abandoned full-time painting and joined the GPO Film Unit. The movement continued to expand through 1935 and 1936: in 1935 Paul Rotha's book Documentary Film was published, Coldstream, Benjamin Britten, John Grierson (who had described the documentary film movement as "the beginning of an adventure in public observation") Stuart Legg and W. H. Auden co-operated to produce

the film "Coal Face" for the GPO Film Unit and Spender's photographs appeared at least once a week in the Daily Mirror. In 1936 George Orwell set out on the road to Wigan Pier, the GPO Film Unit produced "Night Mail" and Tom Harrisson returned from Malekula, immediately settling in Bolton to begin his anthropology of the English. In February 1937, the same month as Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier was published by the Left Book Club, the founding of M-O was formally announced in the New Statesman.<sup>65</sup>

Although many of the practitioners of documentary knew each other, it was not a conscious movement. Looking back, Humphrey Spender recalled:

"I don't think there was ever a conscious awareness of that. I don't think I ever thought of myself as more than having drifted into an activity which became more and more challenging and more and more fascinating."<sup>66</sup>

The challenge and fascination lay in observing and recording areas of life of which Spender and many of his contemporaries knew very little. As Stuart Hall has written, the documentary movement was characterised by a

"... passion to present, above all to present people to themselves in wholly recognisable terms; terms which acknowledge their commonness, their variety, their individuality, their representativeness, which find them 'intensely interesting'."<sup>67</sup>

Much documentary work was part of that tradition which Peter Keating has referred to as "the literature of social exploration". Keating explains that:

"In mid nineteenth century there develops a distinctive branch of modern literature in which a representative of one class consciously sets out to explore, analyse and report upon, the life of another class lower in the social scale than his own."<sup>68</sup>

This nineteenth century literature based much of its imagery on the exploration of Empire. While missionaries attempted to bring Christianity to savages at the ends of the earth, a heathen, ignorant, dangerous native population was to be found in the heart of the Empire, in England and especially in the East End of London; there was an urgent need for the investigation of the life and leisure of this savage civilisation. Reviewing Bill Brandt's book of photographs, The English at Home, published in the spring of 1936, Raymond Mortimer wrote:

"Mr Brandt shows himself to be not only an artist but an anthropologist. He seems to have wandered about England with the detached curiosity of a man investigating the customs of some remote and unfamiliar tribe."<sup>69</sup>

In his preface to the first edition of London Labour and the London Poor Mayhew had recommended his study to his readers as

"supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public has less knowledge than the most distant tribes on the earth."<sup>70</sup>

One English social explorer of the 1930's, Tom Harrisson, certainly had less knowledge of the English working class than he had of Malekulan cannibals. Looking back in 1947, Harrisson wrote:

"In my teens and twenties I was a biologist and I was sent to various and remote places of the world to study birds and animals and later to study human beings .... But it gradually became borne in upon me that what I was doing at great expense to various scientific bodies, as well as at considerable cost to my own time and health, could equally be done at home, within our own civilisation. The wilds of Lancashire or the mysteries of the East End of London were as little explored as the cannibal interior of the New Hebrides or the headhunter hinterland of Borneo .... In particular, my experiences living among cannibals in the New Hebrides .... taught me the many points in common between these wild-looking, fuzzy-haired, black, smelly people and our own, so when I came home from that expedition, I determined to apply the same methods here in Britain."<sup>71</sup>

Another feature of the literature of social exploration which Keating points to is the tradition of the explorer himself attempting to become part of the poor as Booth had done, staying as a lodger in workers' homes in the East End.<sup>72</sup> Orwell, of course, is the best-known interwar exponent of this device, but at exactly the same time as Orwell was exploring the spikes of England and the poor hospitals of Paris, so Tom Harrisson was tramping the East End, sleeping in Salvation Army hostels, mixing with the lowest poor. So Harrisson, like Orwell, born outside England, lacking a close family life, educated at Harrow (to balance Orwell's Eton education) and briefly at Cambridge, and spending five years in and around South-East Asia, returned to England, to Bolton, to explore the peculiarities of the English. As Tom Harrisson himself put it, and as Orwell undoubtedly believed:

"If you are not born and brought up in England, it gives you a much more objective attitude to the country when you arrive."<sup>73</sup>

Harrisson chose Bolton because, as he later wrote:

"... the one and only thing which I could find that affected the lives of people in all the places I had been everywhere in the world was the Unilever Combine."<sup>74</sup>

William Lever had been born in Bolton. Harrisson began by finding out all he could about the town, working in the day as a lorry driver, shop-assistant, labourer, cotton operative and ice-cream man, and in the evening touring the pubs, attending political meetings and visiting members of the Leverhulme family. Reading the New Statesman in a public library, Harrisson saw Madge's letter, 'Anthropology at Home', and within a month M-O was founded.

PART 11.

MASS-OBSERVATION.

1. OBJECTIVES

The aims and objects of M-O were stated in an introductory pamphlet published in February, 1937. The public, denied the facts by the press and the Government, were gripped by fantasy and superstition. They were imbued with a distrust of science which seemed to be employed against the people rather than to help understanding. In these circumstances the people fell back on a certain fatalism:

"This fatalism reaches its extreme in the general attitude to war and scientific methods of destruction. The fear of air raids and gas is part of the general fear of what science may do next - exemplified in popular myths about a death ray. The fear of gas especially, the all-pervasive death which attacks all classes and all sections, combatants and non-combatants, and against which all defence is probably useless - brings with it that doubt and scepticism and despair from which our enquiry starts. But doubt of science, because it can thus deal death, may take either a scientific or an anti-scientific shape. Gas and the bomber, modern scientific products, are therefore calculated to make acute the controversy between science and superstition. The controversy becomes a very simple one: which gives us most hope of survival?"<sup>75</sup>

Science was not only used against ordinary people in war, it was also used at home to play upon people's suggestibility through advertising:

"In 1937 the advertising agencies and daily newspapers employ the best empirical anthropologists and psychologists in the country. These great organisations base their work on the assumption that the human mind is suggestible and they aim their suggestions at that part of the human mind in which the superstitious elements predominate."<sup>76</sup>

Mass-Observation would counteract this exploitation by showing people why they were so "suggestible". M-O, therefore, started off as the declared enemy of advertising and market research.

A new science of ourselves was necessary. It would be truly democratic in that the scientists would be the people themselves; the scientist and the subject would be one. The function of the observer would be

"to describe fully, clearly, and in simple language all that he sees and hears in connection with the specific problem he is asked to work on."<sup>77</sup>

Observers would be

"meteorological stations from whose reports a weather map of popular feeling can be compiled."<sup>78</sup>



The essential corollary of this army of amateur observers was a group of professional scientists:

"The work of the professional scientist helps to give us a more rigorous objectivity. So also can the use of scientific instruments of precision. Photography, film technique, sound recording, and physiological tests by experts will provide a check on our observations. We shall collaborate in building up museums of sound, smell, food, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers etc. We shall also build up files dealing with problems of assimilation - the practical difficulties of an observer in entering a new environment. He should be able to hear records of dialects which are strange to him. He should even be able to find in a field wardrobe the necessary outfit of clothing for effective assimilation ... We shall have to make a cultural survey of the British Isles. From the survey, maps will be prepared, dividing the country into cultural zones in which to place our centres."<sup>74</sup>

The results of all this work would be made known to the widest possible public:

"The facts must be made accessible in plain English which every one can understand. This is a science which can only work if it is kept free from scientific jargon, and also from the obscurity typical of the contemporary artist and intellectual. It has also to avoid the facile temptations of popular exposition. The entire population is impregnated with a catch-word culture ceaselessly diffused by the written and spoken word. Only the completely objective fact can escape the ill effects of such treatment. The idea, being more abstract, is a hundred times delayed or illegitimised before it reaches at fifth hand the ultimate consumer, the ordinary man who has no defence against what he is told. The lesson is to stick to facts, and to set them down as intelligently as is humanly possible."<sup>80</sup>

This was the ideal of the founders of M-O, a truly democratic science of ourselves. But the contradictions which would become acute in the late 1940's, were already apparent in 1937. M-O wrote:

"A scientific knowledge of their own social environment, habits, behaviour, and those of forty or fifty million others, is going to benefit most people. Their motives for wanting the knowledge will vary and they will put it to different uses - in some cases to opposite and conflicting uses. Such knowledge can be of use to both the pacifist who wishes to prevent recruiting and to the war office which wants to stimulate it. The advertising agency needs such knowledge to sell the products of his clients, and the man in the street needs the same knowledge to help prevent himself from being taken in by commercial and political propaganda."<sup>81</sup>



## 2. FIRST YEAR'S WORK

From the beginning M-O planned to have two bases; one, Charles Madge's house at Blackheath, the other a small terraced house in Davenport Street, Bolton, Tom Harrisson's base. There would be two initial projects, Tom Harrisson's Worktown project, his collection of facts through an anonymous observation in Bolton, while Madge and Jennings in London would build up a collection of observer's diaries. These diaries would be written by volunteer, amateur observers on the 12th of each month and would deal with the every day concerns of the diarists' lives. Much has been made of this duality of Mass-Observation, both in the few brief academic comments which have been written on the organisation, and by Tom Harrisson himself. The academics focus on the duality largely because they have taken too literary a line on M-O;<sup>82</sup> Tom Harrisson emphasised it as a weapon in his exceptionally vitriolic argument with Charles Madge in 1939 and 1940. Yet there is something in it, especially as regards the first two years' work of M-O. The key to the problem lies in an element of the cultural history of the 1930's which fed into M-O and which we have not yet looked at, the surrealist movement.

In the introductory pamphlet Harrisson and Madge seemed to have separate aims for the organisation. They wrote:

"Tom Harrisson believes that M-O, by laying open to doubt all existing philosophies of life as possibly incomplete, yet by refusing to neglect the significance of any of them, may yet make a new synthesis. This may lead to something less fierce, more understanding and permanent, than the present miserable conflicts of dogmatic faith, in race, politics, and religion."

Whereas, according to Charles Madge:

"M-O is an instrument for collecting facts, not a means of producing a synthetic philosophy, a super-science or super-politics. The availability of facts will liberate certain tendencies in science, war and politics, because it will add to the social consciousness of the time."<sup>83</sup>

One strange thing about these two statements is that one would have expected the latter statement to have been written by Tom Harrisson, even if Charles Madge could never have written the first. Harrisson was always the scientist, he was determined to collect facts and his ideas for M-O were usually more closely worked out than his statement in the introductory pamphlet would suggest. Much of the confusion lay at the Blackheath end of the operation. All three of the main Blackheath founders of M-O, Madge, Jennings and Stuart Legg, had been closely involved with the short-lived British surrealist movement, indeed, Legg's wife had been a living exhibit at the Surrealist Exhibition of 1936.<sup>84</sup> Madge started off with the idea of using the M-O diaries for surrealist purposes, to collect accounts of people's dreams, to search for coincidences, to search for mass fantasies, for what he called 'dominant images', to uncover the 'collective unconscious'. Kathleen Raine, who was married to Charles Madge in 1937, has since written:

"To Charles, who seemed a man inspired almost as a medium is inspired or possessed, the idea of M-O was less sociology than a kind of poetry, akin to Surrealism. He was the expression of the unconscious collective life of England, literally, in writings on the walls, telling of the hidden thoughts and dreams of the inarticulate masses."<sup>85</sup>

It would seem, however, that Madge and Jennings founded M-O when they were both at a point of transition, moving on from surrealism to something much closer to documentary. The first full-scale book produced by M-O was May 12th,<sup>86</sup> an account of the Coronation of George VI, based on newspaper cuttings, answers to a questionnaire leaflet, "Where were you on May 12th?", the observations of a mobile squad of twelve 'professional' observers and the accounts of Coronation Day by volunteer diarists. The book owes much to documentary film, cutting from account to account, from shot to shot, building up an overall picture of Coronation Day. There are sections on the preparations for the procession, on the procession itself, on Coronation Day across the country as a whole and on individuals' responses to the occasion.<sup>87</sup>

Most critics have agreed that the book was something of a failure. In the press May 12th was given a mixed reception, but more importantly for M-O nearly every journal noticed it and bad publicity was better than no publicity at all. Woodrow Wyatt, a young undergraduate, down from Oxford for the summer vacation, undertook to analyse press reaction.<sup>88</sup> He found that most review ridiculed M-O's claim to scientificity, The Spectator opining that:

"Scientifically, they're about as valuable as a chimpanzees' tea party at the zoo,"<sup>89</sup>

while Evelyn Waugh found in the book:

"a great deal of pseudo-scientific showmanship."<sup>90</sup>

One of the few reviewers to praise M-O's objectivity was William Hickey in the Daily Express who commented on M-O's "fine, objective reports"; this, however, could hardly be described as a fine, objective review, for William Hickey was Tom Driberg, an old friend of Tom Harrisson. Most reviewers agreed that the material had some general interest and that it would be of great value to future historians. Papers of the right found a leftist bias in M-O, while left-wing journals were generally extremely hostile, G.W. Stonier writing a totally condemnatory review in the New Statesman. Papers of the centre, The Listener, John O'London's weekly, Night and Day, were friendly. Apart from comments on scientificity the most common complaint was that M-O was meddling in concerns which were none of its business. The Star was a more general problem in M-O noting that

"The inchoate desire to express themselves, especially among young people, who would be better employed doing something useful, seems to be a malaise of the times..."<sup>91</sup>

The Daily Herald, later in the year, labelled observers "pschoanthroposociologic Nosey Parkers",<sup>92</sup> but the most concerted attack came from the London Evening News. Mass-Observation presented:

"unequalled opportunities for the pettifogging, the malicious, the cranky, the interfering, the mildly dotty."<sup>93</sup>

In a leader The Evening News commented:

"In the next few months, unless this game is stamped upon hardly and authoritatively, the furtive notebook, the licked pencil, the earnest, preoccupied expression are all going to have a sinister meaning."<sup>94</sup>

M-O was beginning to trespass on the territory of the press, as it was later to trespass on that of market research; in both cases it met with a hostile reaction. In 1947, Bob Willcock, by that time M-O's Research Director, saw the major weakness of May 12th as being too great a proliferation of detail without any connecting commentary and with no conclusion being drawn. He thought, however, that the lack of conclusions was in some ways a good thing, for to have drawn conclusions on such a sensitive subject as the Coronation would have been bound to have angered some sections of the public and to have made enemies for M-O at the outset.<sup>95</sup>

Hynes' criticism of May 12th touches on another important aspect of the "duality" of M-O. He sees the book as an original idea, "the most substantial and most literary product of the entire movement."<sup>96</sup> For Hynes it fails due to "the flat repetitiveness of the prose"<sup>97</sup>, and due to its inability to live up to the claim of M-O to have successfully brought together the artist and scientist. In the introductory pamphlet they wrote:

"At the time that this pamphlet is being written, art and science are both turning towards the same field: the field of human behaviour which lies immediately before our eyes."<sup>98</sup>

And in the joint letter to the New Statesman M-O's founders had written:

"The artist and the scientist, each compelled by historic necessity out of their artificial exclusiveness, are at last joint forces and are turning back towards the mass from which they had detached themselves."<sup>99</sup>

Ironically, the first six months of M-O saw the period of greatest separation between artist and scientist. May 12th was wholly the work of the Blackheath group; Tom Harrison took no part in its production. It was put together by a number of poets under the direction of Madge and Jennings; Ruthven Todd, William Empson, Kathleen Raine were among the Blackheath workers involved in the production of the book. There was always a degree of separation between Blackheath and Bolton, but from late 1937 both began to move towards the centre of the documentary movement; in Bolton Harrison brought together artists, photographers, writers, and sociologists to make an intensive study of Worktown, while in London Madge began to ask his diarists to record their reactions to more topical matters, Armistice Day, Munich, the coming of war.

### 3. WORKTOWN AND HOLIDAY TOWN

Looking back from 1970, Tom Harrisson wrote of the Worktown project:

"We sought to fully penetrate the society we were studying, to live in it as effective members of it and to percolate into every corner of every day and every night of industrial life". 100

The aim was to understand Worktown by "looking, listening, observing, without asking any questions".<sup>101</sup> For the first eighteen months or so, very few Bolton people realised that they were being observed; according to Harrisson, the invisibility of the observer was an essential element of the operation.

To set up the project Harrisson solicited financial gifts from two northern industrialists and received generous advances on four books to be written on the project from Victor Gollancz. When funds ran low Harrisson would turn his hand to broadcasting, a talk for BBC Manchester, for instance, being entitled "Art and the Ordinary Chap"<sup>102</sup> or to popular journalism, where he would produce his standard piece "I married a cannibal".<sup>103</sup>

Harrisson organised the project with tremendous energy and zeal.

"...all private life was killed and M-O was the only thing anyone was allowed to think about from dawn to dream." 104

Through his extraordinary enthusiasm Harrisson managed to persuade all kinds of people to come to work with him in Bolton. In the Spring of 1937, Humphrey Spender, who had come to know Harrisson through his brother Michael, who had been on an expedition with Harrisson in the early 1930's, first came to Worktown to take photographs. In the Summer of that year, Julian Trevelyan and William Empson worked in Bolton, Empson being sent out to take notes on the contents of sweet-shop windows, while Trevelyan carried a suitcase full of old newspapers, magazines, gum bottles and scissors around the town, making collages of cotton mills and street scenes.<sup>105</sup> In the Summer of 1938, two painters of the Euston Road realist group, William Coldstream and Graham Bell, came to Worktown; Coldstream painted a panoramic view of the town from the roof of the Art Gallery, while Bell produced plans and sketches for a whole series of Worktown pictures, of mills, pubs, markets, of a wedding, a funeral, a dance hall. Humphrey Spender stayed in Worktown as often as he could throughout 1938, but by the Autumn of that year he had joined the newly founded "Picture Post". In October Spender held a one-man show in London of his Bolton paintings and photographs; in the notes to the exhibition he explained that photography was of pre-eminent importance because it was:

"the system with which people can be pictured by the people for the people." 106

These artists were set to paint and photograph exactly what they saw. They were there to record the facts. Spender has recently recalled that there was

"This great principle of never fixing anything up, it must be a genuine incident. Very much not what the Mirror's policy was of 'laying on'.



'setting up' .... That was an absolute Golden Rule, if anyone knew they were being photographed then it was a failure; It had to be unobserved." 107

Many of the people who came to work with Harrisson in Bolton, apart from the painters these included Dick Crossman, Woodrow Wyatt and Tom Driberg, came as social explorers, upper middle class young men who felt that it was their duty to make contact with, and to get to know, the working class. Humphrey Spender has explained it thus:

"My kind of class..... certainly came from a privileged background of nannies and governesses. There were always servants in the house and we were really protected from it (i.e. contact with the working class)....so immediately that set up a peculiar attraction towards forbidden fruit, towards the common people." 108

However, like Orwell on his journey through the North in the previous year, many of the Worktown observers were fully conscious of the distance between them, and the working class people of Bolton. Julian Trevalyan has recalled:

"I was aware, not for the first time, of the gulf that separated me from these English workers, the gulf of education, language, accent and social behaviour. It was my constant desire during these years to bridge that gulf and occasionally I succeeded." 109

Humphrey Spender, asked recently if he talked to the people he photographed, replied:

"No.. I would have been terrified. The whole difficulty for me, there, was what happens when you talk to them. They are total foreigners, and it was acutely embarrassing ... there were occasions when I was very much on my own and really quite depressed and frightened ... for me to go into a north country pub, and really speaking a completely different language, to be a kind of 'hail fellow well met' person was very embarrassing ..... the main anxiety, purpose, was to become invisible and to make my equipment invisible, which is one of the reasons I carried around an absolute minimum of equipment, which was often concealed in a dreary old mackintosh." 110

Only Tom Harrisson himself does not seem to have been beset by these problems, perhaps as much due to his self-confidence, and indeed arrogance, as to any inherent ability to merge with the working class. In 1960 he wrote:

"It is difficult to remember ... how in those far off days, nearly everybody who wasn't born into the working class regarded them as almost a race apart. Even good books like Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier which really tried to get under the surface, started out from this underlying and sociologically miserable premise. The biggest thrill which this lately initiated cannibal experienced was finding it no more difficult to be accepted as an equal in a cotton mill, or as a lorry driver or an ice-cream man." 111

Harrison could get his observers to do practically anything for him - if Empson was asked to take notes on a sweet-shop window, he took them; Julia Trevelyan painted in the middle of the street. As Spender recalls:

"Tom literally did say: go into public lavatories and take pictures of people peeing." 112

For a couple of months in the summer, M-O would move from Worktown to Holiday Town, Blackpool. Observers were placed in various hotels and boarding houses, from the very best to the doss house. Their brief was to find out everything they could about the hotel, prices, menus, colour of the wall-paper, and everything about the guests, names, occupations, hobbies, even their dreams. They had to find out how each holiday maker spent his or her week or fortnight, following them at a discreet distance, watching how much money they spent and where they spent it. The M-O team was particularly fascinated by Blackpool's amusements and side-shows; the five-legged cow, the museum of anatomy featuring a pregnant, bearded man, Professor Aubrey Winston Grey and his football pool winning Bhudda, scientific miracle robots appealed to the anthropologist in Harrison and to Spender's sense of the surreal. 113

Very little of this Bolton and Blackpool work has been published. A short analysis of seaside music hall jokes was included in the book First Year's Work: M-O discovered that the same jokes was told in three separate theatres on the same night and that the most popular subjects for jokes were death and disease. 114 In 1943 John Sommerfield's book, entitled significantly for the time, The Pub and the People, was published, the only one of the original four books commissioned by Gollancz to see the light of day. 115 Some Bolton and Blackpool material from the late 1930's appeared much later in Britain Revisited (1960). The vast bulk of the Worktown and Holiday material, which Harrison estimated made up between 6 and 8 per cent of the entire collection, is stored in over fifty large cardboard boxes in the M-O Archive. A list of the contents of these Boxes is given in the Appendices and this should give some idea of the scope of the project; but for its richness and for an appreciation of the depth of its involvement with the people of Worktown, the reader would do well to turn to The Pub and the People.

#### 4. THE MASS-OBSERVERS.

For reasons of space, it is impossible to deal with the Day Surveys and Diaries in any detail in this paper. In the early months of 1937, through advertisements in a variety of newspapers and magazines, Mass-Observation recruited something like 400 men and women whose first tasks were to write one-day diaries on the twelfth of each month (known as Day Surveys) and to reply to occasional questions (known as 'Directives'), on topics such as smoking, reading habits, Armistice Day and Christmas. During 1938 the Day Survey idea lapsed, except for a few special occasions, such as August Bank Holiday; the chief work of the Observers, voluntary and full-time, in 1938 seems to have been covering the Munich Crisis and its aftermath. Unfortunately, many of the boxes holding the 1938 material have been damaged and some may have been lost. In 1939, the volunteer Observers, now known as 'The Panel', started to respond to regular monthly Directives, asking for their opinions on, for example, class, race and the political situation.

Sometimes Observers were asked to interview their family and friends on such topics.

For our purposes, the importance of the Day Surveys and the Panel Reports lies in the voluntary contributors themselves. Hynes has written that M-O was an organisation designed for bored and emotionally impoverished people. The diarists, he says, were largely young, single, provincial and lower middle class, "the lonely bored lovers of unexciting lives", turning to M-O for emotional relief. 116 Hynes' account is a serious misrepresentation of the motives and interests of most of the voluntary Observers.

There were, it is quite true, a number of diarists who were lonely and depressed, yet the great majority of them, whilst certainly being lower middle class, volunteered to work for M-O because they wanted to be of some use in the fight against Fascism and against official neglect of ordinary people. They, like the documentarists themselves, felt both a need to know and a desire to make their voices heard. The lower middle class diarists share certain common characteristics.<sup>117</sup> Few were in full-time education much past the age of sixteen, although many had won scholarships from elementary to secondary school. Those who did go on to university almost without exception returned to the lower middle class world as school-teachers. Many had had childhoods interrupted by the crisis of the early years of the century: a number of fathers had been killed in the First World War, some families lost their savings in the inflation which followed the First World War, some had been ruined by the slump. Many of the diarists had themselves had problems finding work in the 1930's and there are many accounts of unemployment. The unmarried diarists tended to live with their parents through their twenties and it is true that one thing which sets the lower middle class off from the more established middle class in these diaries is the wider scope of the latter's lives, university, foreign travel, a larger and more varied range of acquaintance. The homes of the lower middle class diarists tended to be in the suburbs of large cities, often in streets which were just beginning to go noticeably down in the world, streets which would have been eminently respectable when the twenty-five year old diarist was born. The diaries contain accounts of the work of clerks, shop-assistants, draughtsmen, many school-teachers, commercial travellers, and laboratory technicians. Most complain about their work from time to time, but few seem fundamentally dissatisfied. Many complain of boredom, but one of the outstanding features of these accounts of lower middle class work is how little work is done. Few started before half-past nine, most took a mid-morning coffee break outside the office or shop, most took at least an hour for lunch and many were off home by four thirty; few stayed at work after five. This is in marked contrast to the accounts of working class diarists who were invariably at work by eight, and never left off until after five.

The majority of the diarists were intelligent young men and women; while some were, perhaps, pretentious, many more were keen to go beyond their limited school education. They read widely, the News Chronicle and the New Statesman being representative journals and many, importantly, were members of the Left Book Club and recorded their excitement when the month's Choice arrived. Among the diarists there were examples of Orwell's youthful snob Bolsheviks, secret teetotallers with vegetarian leanings and fruit juice drinkings, nature

cure quack Quakers; one diarist fitted Orwell's description almost exactly, except that he was in his sixties. He was a New Statesman reader, a member of the NUR (he was a draughtsman and clerk), a vegetarian, a tee-totaller who even refused to drink tea and took hot water instead, a member of the Manchester Anti-Smokers Defence League, a fresh air fanatic, a member of the Left Book Club, a Quaker, a sympathiser with the Communist Party but also an advocate of proportional representation, was anti-cruel sports, anti football pools and, at the age of 64, a keen youth hosteller. On youth hostelling holidays in the Lake District, on which he took his wife, he would slip out of the hostel at half-past five in the morning and go and leaflet the nearest town for one of his worthy causes.<sup>118</sup> Most diarists, however, were "ordinary people of good will". They were deeply worried about the coming of war: as early as spring 1937 some recounted dreams of being caught up in air raids, while others debated with themselves as to whether they should fight. The low church pacifist influence was strong, but also was a keen interest in scouting, indeed non-conformity, pacifism and scouting often went together. Those who chose not to join in such organised interests were often keen cyclists or walkers, and many holidays in the summer of 1937 took the form, for the lower middle class young, of rambles through the West Country or cycle tours through rural Kent.

Only a few diarists were directly involved in politics and, by in large, it was left to working class diarists to provide accounts of trade union activity at work. As far as I know, our draughtsman mentioned above and another railwayman in the North-East (who was victimised for his trade union activities during the General Strike)<sup>119</sup> were the only white-collar workers among the 1937 diarists to be members of trade unions. Of the very small number of lower middle class diarists who were members of political parties, most were members of the Communist Party. But this is not to say that the majority of diarists were uninterested in politics or in the development of the crisis through which they were living. Like membership of the Left Book Club, participation in M-O was a kind of private commitment to a public cause. When M-O recruited 'The Panel' in 1939 they asked all voluntary contributors to write life histories and to describe the area in which they lived, their jobs and their political and religious views. There was little difference in the social composition of the 1939 group compared with that of 1937, indeed, it was perhaps even more solidly lower middle class, and no difference within the lower middle class in educational background, area of residence etc.. The one noticeable difference between the 1937 and the 1939 contributor is that the latter seem more politically bewildered. In 1937 the war in Spain was not yet lost and there was a certain confidence in the diarists' expressions of their political views; by 1939 that confidence was gone. But lower middle class commitment to M-O had not diminished for M-O, along with Penguin Specials, Picture Post and the radical documentarists as a whole promised to give the lower middle class some purchase on the crisis, just as the Common Wealth Party with its ethical socialism would promise so much for these same people in the last years of the War.<sup>120</sup>

Very little use has been made of these diaries in the years since they were written. The reports of Coronation Day were used in May 12th but the poor reception which the book received discouraged Madge and Harrison. During the war Harrison fleetingly thought of producing a book of War diarists' accounts of the home front but remembered the reviews of May 12th and gave up the idea. As Harrison pointed out, the diaries become easier to deal with the further the lives and events they describe.



recede into memory.<sup>121</sup> However, little research into the diaries has, as yet, been undertaken. For the time being they remain packed away in boxes in the M-O Archive.

##### 5. CRISIS: MUNICH, PUBLIC OPINION AND THE POLITICS OF THE PEOPLE

"Be it our task to discern the signs of the times -  
to watch the progress of this crisis and to direct  
it for good instead of evil."

Robert Owen 1832<sup>122</sup>

The feeling of relief which swept the country after Chamberlain's appeasing visits to Munich in September, 1938, was short lived. It was clear that there were to be no peace in our time. By the New Year the situation was getting steadily worse. In January, 1939, Barcelona fell. In February Britain recognised Franco and in March Madrid fell. In the meantime, Hitler had made a number of speeches demanding the return of the Germany colonies. In March Germany occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia and the port of Memel was ceded to Germany by Lithuania. The British Press accepted 'D' notices, keeping the full gravity of the situation quiet, while the Daily Express, realising that fears of war were damaging business, saw fit to run, in the early months of 1939, a "No War This Year" campaign.<sup>123</sup> It was in this atmosphere that M-O's most important published contribution to the documentary movement appeared. It was, significantly, a Penguin Special, Britain by Mass Observation.<sup>124</sup>

The book contains examples of the many different approaches of M-O. There is a section on the newly imported craze of all-in wrestling and a section on the origins of the new dance style, the Lambeth Walk. There is a piece on the Westhoughton Wakes Week Festival taken from the Worktown study, a section on the Armistice Day interruption of 1937 taken from diarists' reports and a short comment on housing. But it is in the first piece, "Crisis", a piece which takes up nearly half the book, that M-O stepped fully into the documentary tradition.

In the crisis of September, 1938, there was an urgent 'need to know':

"It is naturally difficult for people to get to know the facts about these things (the international situation), because secrecy is essential when bluff and counter bluff are the order of the day. This is a democratic country, so we are supposed to have some idea of what is going on. For this we depend on wireless and newspaper presentation of the news. But can we believe what we read and hear? People want inside information; they want to get behind the news. This is impossible for the vast majority, so they have to accept what the newspapers say, or else stop bothering....(therefore)....  
...Fact is urgent - we are cogs in a vast and complicated machine which may turn out to be an infernal machine that is going to blow us all to smithereens... It is because of this situation - the urgency of fact, the voicelessness of everyman

and the smallness of the group which controls fact-getting and fact-distributing - that this book came to be written .... (The book) .... aims .. to .. give both ear and voice to what the millions are feeling and doing under the shadow of these terrific events." 125

The first section of Britain by Mass-Observation is, therefore, an analysis of public opinion at the time of the Munich Crisis. It is a brilliant piece of journalism as well as a significant new departure in public opinion polling, making use of the entire arsenal of M-O techniques, field work, in-depth questionnaires, reports by 'professional' observers, diarists' accounts, overheard conversations, etc.. Above all, it is fully part of the documentary movement: not only does it show people to themselves, show them clearly what they were thinking at the time, it is also a damning attack on the official organs of public opinion, the Fleet Street press. It is a statement for us against them, populist, bitter, superficially non-political, an attack on the complacency of the 'Old Gang'. It may be that war was averted at Munich, put off for a year, but that popular discontent which would find fullest expression in the wartime radicalism of 'The Commentators', the new Daily Mirror, Picture Post, Michael Foot, J.B.Priestley, was being clearly voiced in the early months of 1939, by the documentarists. As Stuart Hall puts it:

"The documentary style, though at one level a form of writing, photographing, filming, recording was, at another level, an emergent form of social consciousness: it registered in the formation of a social rhetoric, the emergent structure of feeling in the immediate pre-war and war periods." 126

Mass-Observation found that as the crises of the years before the War grew more serious, so public interest in them appeared to decline. M-O attributed this factor to a defence against nervous strain, to a kind of fatalism and to the general distrust of newspaper information. 127 M-O was not only concerned that the press mis-led the public but also that Fleet Street mis-led the Government about what the public was thinking. Fleet Street claimed to have sole access to public opinion but, according to M-O, they did not measure it scientifically, indeed, they rarely measured it at all. In many cases what a newspaper stated to be public opinion was just as likely to be the proprietor's own pet opinion of that day. For example, when the Daily Mail confidently stated that:

"The British nation unreservedly places its complete trust in the Prime Minister, Mr Neville Chamberlain," 128

the point, for M-O, was not so much whether this was true or false, but that the press took no trouble to find out what public opinion was. Sometimes, of course, the general feeling in the country would coincide with the political prejudices of sections of the press, at other times the views of the bulk of the press and public opinion would be disastrously out of step. M-O preferred that newspapers should take an honest line as, for example, did the Daily Mirror when, in the midst of the Munich Crisis, it declared:

"What do we know this morning? Not much." 129

Gauging public opinion at the beginning of the Munich Crisis M-O found:

1. "A resistance to the idea that war is coming and this resistance grows as the danger of war is brought nearer."

2. "Although most people are anxious and would like to know more about issues that they know to be a matter of life and death, they are discouraged and bewildered by the official secrecy and newspaper contradictions."
3. "A sense of hopelessness which makes it seem to one in every two that there is nothing we can do about it." 130

Older people tended to expect war more than young people, men more than women. But generally

"as the danger of war comes nearer, so are people less able to admit it, partly through their own wishful thinking, partly through the increasing scarcity of facts." 131

In M-O's analysis of the press coverage of Munich Tom Harrisson's anthropological instincts came to the fore. The press treated Hitler as the blood-thirsty enemy, the evil god, Chamberlain as the magical old man who goes up into the sky to bring peace to the world.<sup>132</sup> On Chamberlain's second visit to Munich there was a huge movement of public opinion in his favour but as the terms began to leak out, as it became clear that Britain had virtually handed over Czechoslovakia to Hitler, public opinion turned against Chamberlain. As The Times later put it, with typical understatement:

"The general character of the terms submitted to the Czech Government for their consideration cannot in the nature of things be expected to make a strong prima facie appeal to them." 133

M-O commented:

"The joy with which the masses welcomed Chamberlain's peace flight, the speed with which the men turned against him when the terms became known, and their readiness to fight Hitler rather sooner than later, are in themselves striking enough examples of the rapidity with which popular opinion remoulds itself. They show clearly enough that the reason why the mass mind is changeable is not any inherent fickleness, but simply that the masses are not given the facts, or are deliberately mis-led." 134

As the crisis deepened one section of the public clamoured for the facts while another section, much, it is clear, to Harrisson's anthropological delight, turned to superstition: in the last week of September, 1938, it seemed that the whole country was praying. Beverly Nicholls wrote of a photograph of Mrs Chamberlain at prayer beside the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"That is one of the pictures that make history beautiful." 135

When it was announced that Chamberlain would fly to Munich to see Hitler for a third time the Archbishop of Canterbury was allotted time during the BBC news to opine that this invitation was due to all the praying the nation had been doing.<sup>136</sup> Godfrey Winn wrote in the Sunday Express:

"Praise be to God and Mr Chamberlain. I find no sacrilege, no bathos, in coupling these two names." 137

It would seem, however, that by the time of the announcement of Chamberlain's third visit, the press and public opinion were to some extent back in harmony. Chamberlain flew to Munich on the Wednesday.

Since the weekend gas masks had been distributed and the unemployed were being used to dig trenches in London's parks. According to M-O, it was the distribution of gas masks which finally convinced the public that war was coming.<sup>138</sup> Monday 26th and Tuesday 27th, September, 1938, were days of great confusion. The press was unable to find out what was going on in Cabinet: all they could do was to report to the nearest minute the times of emergency Cabinet meetings. In their uncertainty as to what the ordinary British citizen was thinking, journalists tried their hand at gauging German public opinion. They announced that the average German was against war as was the ordinary Italian. Hitler was out of touch with German public opinion. The Herald and the Mail published the same picture of a happy scene in a German cafe entitled "The Average German Does not Want War": unfortunately, the cafe's customers at the time were English journalists.<sup>139</sup> The English public tried to get to the facts of the situation. A Penguin Special on Czechoslovakia sold out of a first print of 50,000 copies in 24 hours and soon a further 100,000 copies were sold.<sup>140</sup> Everywhere there was confusion: the telephone system was disorganised by the number of calls, there was a huge boom in marriages, bus companies did big business in one way tickets out of London. Extraordinary rumours spread through the country, rumours which, according to M-O, originated in Fleet Street and the Stock Exchange: 200,000 S.S. men had been mobilised to control the German population, during a military parade in Berlin a car had collided with a tank and splintered it.<sup>141</sup>

It is not, therefore, surprising that when Chamberlain announced to the House of Commons that he was to visit Munich on the invitation of Hitler, the news was greeted with hysterical relief. Here was solid news, a chance to resolve the confusion. The hysteria was at its height in the House of Commons itself. M-O had an observer in the Lobby. He wrote:

"A young member rushes out, shouts: 'You're not going to be called up now, you needn't worry', followed by six others who wave their hands and laugh and shout the news .... Then out comes the Arch-bishop of Canterbury lifting his head, his eyes red and filled with tears. John Strachey strides in from outside the Hall, passes the police. They are taken aback but he is through and in the Inner Lobby, too quickly for a policeman to follow him. He reappears with Maisky who is smiling ... Grandi comes out, a raincoat slung over his shoulders like a cape: he switches on an electric grin ..." <sup>142</sup>

It seems true that much of the relief felt in high places was shared throughout the country, but M-O alleged that much of the hero-worship of Chamberlain was trumped up by the press. The crowds in Downing Street numbered about 5000, that is, M-O wrote

"... half the number of people that can be counted on at a routine C.P. rally in Trafalgar Square ... No Second Division football team could survive on a Chamberlain gate. Nevertheless, the next morning the press arrayed photos and headlines which gave the impression of enormous crowds." <sup>143</sup>

It did not take long for the realisation to dawn on the public that Munich was no great triumph of diplomacy, but a shoddy betrayal of Czechoslovakia. The press, however, continued to laud Chamberlain



through into 1939; in an effort to get business moving again Fleet Street declared that permanent peace was now assured.<sup>144</sup> Everyone, the press declared, was pro-Chamberlain; the Conservative Party was almost convinced and made plans for a snap election.<sup>145</sup> M-O concluded:

"During one whole week, no outsider reading an English newspaper could have guessed that an increasing proportion of the population were feeling once more increasingly bewildered, fearful and ashamed:" 146

The rhetoric of M-O's study of the Munich Crisis was that of the documentary movement and of the radical commentators of the early years of the War. It was a piece of popular journalism, written for the people, about themselves. There could be no doubt where M-O's commitment lay; there was little attempt to create any distance from their subject for the sake of scientific analysis. The piece was a sustained attack on the establishment, the press, the Church, the Government. That undifferentiated body, "the people", who would, within a year, be fighting "the people's war", had been recognised: men and women "of goodwill", threatened by Hitler, hoodwinked by the press, made shameful by Chamberlain.

As with most other components of the documentary movement, M-O was nominally a-political; it was, in fact, part of that alliance if the non-aligned which reached its most politically articulate form in the wartime Commonwealth Party. Harrison liked to regard himself as an objective scientist whose scientific interests occasionally included political affairs. In 1940 he wrote to Charles Madge:

"I am political in the same sort of way as H.G.Wells, or Bertrand Russell, and not quite so political as Julian Huxley ... These people have no interest in party politics, though one could at a scratch call their activities political. I regard them as merely polemical." 147

Harrison had shown his "scientific" attitude to politics while working in Bolton. All the political groups had been observed and a book on Worktown politics was planned, but it would have been quite against Harrison's conception of the Worktown project for M-O to have actually taken part in Bolton's politics.

The "Worktown project had, however, been conceived during Harrison's most anthropological period. By the end of 1938, M-O was, as we have seen, being drawn into direct involvement in the national crisis, being drawn in on the side of the people. That the press' analysis of public opinion was wrong and that M-O's was right was clearly shown in the results of the series of seven by-elections which took place in the autumn following the Munich Crisis.<sup>148</sup> In each contest the main anti-Government candidate increased his share of the poll, and in two constituencies, which had previously been Government seats, anti-government candidates opposed to the Munich settlement were returned. In Oxford a Lib-Lab pact was formed, largely on the instigation of Roy Harrod and Dick Crossman, at that time an Oxford City Councillor and soon to be a close collaborator with Tom Harrison. A veritable popular front of speakers turned up to support the compromise candidate, Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, against the young Government candidate, Quintin Hogg. Beveridge, Acland, Haldane, Harold Macmillan, Randolph Churchill, and Ellen Wilkinson spoke for Lindsay. Hogg was

returned but the Government vote fell.<sup>149</sup> For our purposes the most important of these seven by-elections is that in Bridgwater, Somerset, a safe Tory seat. Sir Richard Acland, M.P. for North Devon and a local Left Book Club group, had been trying for a year to promote a non-party candidate to oppose the Government in Bridgwater and eventually secured the agreement of the Liberal and Labour Parties. Vernon Bartlett, Senior Foreign Correspondent of the liberal News Chronicle, was chosen: he had been with Chamberlain on all three trips to Germany and was bitterly opposed to appeasement. The press converged on Bridgwater, as did Tom Harrisson and a Mass-Observation team. Harrisson went to work, analysing local opinion, sorting out which issues seemed likely to swing the election. He did not hold out much hope for success for Bartlett, but nevertheless advised him on popular opinion. Bartlett, a man of strong personality, was returned, his victory being an early forerunner of the numerous by-election victories of independent candidates in the later years of the war. 150 M-O's involvement in Bartlett's victory was itself a precursor of their later involvement in wartime radicalism.

Through 1939 M-O continued to analyse popular opinion with regard to the likelihood of war and to criticise the press for leading the public to believe that peace was assured. In August M-O took regular opinion polls and found that the pattern they had noticed in September, 1938, had grown more marked. As war came obviously nearer, so fewer people said that they expected war. When Anthony Eden had resigned early in 1938, 34 per cent of those questioned expected war in the near future. In August 1939, only 18 per cent expected war. On August 31st, 1939, the day before Hitler's invasion of Poland, a large majority of those questioned thought Hitler was bluffing. On the day of the invasion those who on the previous day had not expected war were hard to find. There was a general feeling of relief, of wanting to get on with it.<sup>151</sup>

The early years of the war were to see Mass-Observation come into its own, along with other components of the documentary movement. In this sense it seems inadequate to see M-O, as Hynes and others have seen it, as the tailend of the literary movement of the 1930's. M-O's years of greatest achievement lay between 1938 and 1942; M-O carried over from the thirties the sense of a "need to know", it associated that "need to know" with a particular vision of "ordinary people" and, along with the rest of the documentary movement, brought the concerns of the common people to the forefront in the years of greatest crisis in "the people's war". As we shall see, M-O also, inevitably given the nature of its basis concepts, ushered the people into a more participatory social democracy within the overall limits of a capitalist State. In the later years of the War, and in the immediate post-war period, M-O's roots in the wider social survey movement of the 1930's would become clear: M-O would analyse for the Government popular reaction to the coming of the Welfare State and would, through market research, co-operate with business in ushering in the 'age of affluence'. Nevertheless, with Picture Post, the documentary film makers, writers like Orwell and Priestley, photographers like Spender and Brandt, M-O bridged the gap between the 1930's and the War. Amidst the elegies of the thirties written between 1937 and 1939 and subsequent academic placings of the end of the decade in 1937, this is a salutary reminder of continuations.<sup>152</sup> Most importantly of all, being a popular organisation, an organisation based on an enthusiastic, concerned, voluntary, participating public, M-O carried 'the people' with it

from the 1930's to the 1940's. As Michael Green has written:

"Of the many moods of writing in the '30's, too quickly collapsed in retrospect, the most tenacious, carried through the mass media in the early years of the War, is the detailed evocation of a determined resilience against official contempt and neglect. By 1940 there could be a widespread and simultaneous attack on behalf of the suffering people against an incompetent and narrow ruling class."<sup>153</sup>

No group more clearly brought out this determined resilience than M-O. Looking back on the period Tom Harrisson wrote:

"We truly tried to bridge a gap, left aching void, between the working streets in Worktown and the sanitube, clean ... deodorant, Ginsbergised layers of LSE sociology, so called. Between, too, Worktown, Melanesia and Borneo. In that time of European squalor, 1937-39, M-O at least did throb, and felt undefeated. Perhaps that was its peculiar contribution - and why so many people who were young and tortured then think kindly of it today."<sup>154</sup>

#### 6. WAR

According to Tom Harrisson, the War brought Mass-Observation "into its own sort of own".<sup>155</sup> M-O had two special services to offer in competition with other bodies which had recently sprung up with the aim of studying public opinion. Firstly, M-O had developed a method of studying public opinion in detail along with interpreting broad trends such as morale. Secondly, as Tom Harrisson wrote to Charles Madge while he was negotiating a contract with Mary Adams and Dick Crossman, both old friends of M-O and Harrisson, at the Ministry of Information:

"Everything is blowing into our hands ... We have got what no-one else has got, facts before the War."<sup>156</sup>

The documentarists, Priestley, Orwell, Jennings, Spender, Harrisson had explored English life before the War and they, along with the people themselves, knew the facts. They were, therefore, especially well qualified to appeal for the unity of all the Englands they had found, a unity of the working class, the lower middle class, all people of "goodwill", against Fascism and against the "Old Gang".

M-O demonstrated their expertise in a book published in early 1940 in which they studied the first four months of the War, War Begins at Home.<sup>157</sup> They looked, among other things, at the impact of the blackout, air raid neurosis, blimp reassurance, class conflict during evacuation, the Ministry of Information and the drought of news. The book was strongly critical of established bodies. Sociology and social psychology had deserted their obligations, according to M-O, just when they should have been bridging the gap between leaders and led. The Institute of Sociology had evacuated itself to Malvern before war broke out and had not returned. It planned to carry out an anthropological and historical study of rural Worcestershire.<sup>158</sup> It was, said M-O, geographically and intellectually isolated. More

importantly, M-O launched a strong attack on Chamberlain and his Government:

"Perhaps the thing which most distinguishes our present leaders is that most of them have hereditary ties or marriage relationships with others in the ruling classes, have had public school and university education, and have been leaders for a very long time, many of them during the 1914-18 War, too. Some, like the present Prime Minister, have come into politics, just as others succeed in their fathers' chip shops .... Mr Chamberlain believes that a luncheon at the Dorchester will have a steadying effect on morale on the home front which will be most valuable. This is the level on which many of our leaders actually think." 159

By the time War Begins at Home was published M-O were working for the Ministry of Information (MoI). They saw this work as helping to create true democratic unity in Britain, a unity in which the interests of ordinary people would be paramount. They saw their task as indicating to the Government the wishes of the people and helping the Government to explain its actions to the people. With M-O's guidance the MoI would no longer produce slogans such as "Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution, will bring us victory." 160 M-O would bridge the gap between leaders and led and both would be provided with the facts. Tom Harrison had a further reason for working with the MoI. In September, 1939, he wrote to Charles Madge:

"I am in favour of the Ministry taking on as many different market research and information organisations as they can get, and I don't think we have to set out to be big shots. Surely what we want is to do enough useful work to be allowed to keep going, so that after the War we may tell the truth for the first time." 161

Bob Willcock, writing in 1947, by which time he had succeeded Harrison as Director of M-O, summed up the organisation's activities in the summer of 1940:

"The period from the invasion of Belgium to Dunkirk was the most intensely active of M-O's existence. Detailed records of people's reactions to the news were kept daily, both through the direct method of questioning and by recording all sorts of overheard remarks and conversations in the street, in pubs, cafes and buses. People were observed in their homes listening to the news on the radio, their day-to-day and sometimes hour-to-hour expectations and fears were recorded, and through the diaries long records of their private conversations and actions were collected. Rumour, including the first version of the parachutist-nun with hairy hands, which persisted for many months later in various forms, were carefully collated and sifted each day. In March M-O began asking the question "What do you think of the news today?" a standard question which has been asked on at least two days a week for the whole war period. Analysed in a standard scheme, answers to this question give one index to the blend of hope, expectation, interest, and forward looking which help to make up the elusive quality "morale". 162



Through commissioning such investigations the MoI angered the jealous press. The full force of their wrath was directed at the Government body established by the MoI, Social Survey, but M-O did not escape, being dubbed by the Daily Express, "Cooper's Snoopers", after the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper. Such investigations, the press argued, were likely to make people introspective and to depress morale; only the Manchester Guardian and the News Chronicle spoke out in favour of the investigators.<sup>165</sup> So great was the outcry that in the early summer of 1940 a Parliamentary debate was held on the matter. In the House, Sir Richard Acland (a close associate of Tom Harrisson, and one of M-O's Parliamentary advisers along with Vernon Bartlett and Nigel Nicolson, who had himself been viciously attacked by the press over his comments on Parliamentary hysteria during the Munich Crisis<sup>164</sup>) led the support for the Ministry of Information. Duff Cooper told a pack of lies, saying the MoI had used M-O only occasionally, and then only as a source of statistics. In fact M-O were already in receipt of large payments from the MoI and had briefed Duff Cooper before the debate. Tom Harrisson travelled back to the MoI with Cooper in the official car after the debate. Acland's and Cooper's defence of the investigators took the wind out of their critics' sails. The blitz silenced all criticism. Harrisson told this story with a certain understandable relish, yet it does illustrate two disturbing implications for M-O during wartime. Firstly, they were part of Government and, although they were severely criticised by Government Ministers, notably by Bevin and Morrison, they were also legitimate targets for the press, who in some ways could be seen as taking over M-O's role of protecting the public from propaganda. Secondly, by prompting Duff Cooper to lie in the House of Commons, M-O were themselves guilty of obscuring the truth and distorting the facts, actions for which for the past two years they had been bitterly criticising both the press and Government. In the early summer of 1940 this was of little importance, M-O were still clearly on the side of the people. Its implications for the future were, nevertheless, disturbing.

Meanwhile, M-O had suffered an internal crisis. Humphrey Jennings had left the organisation early in 1938, and since then Madge and Harrisson had been in charge. At the beginning of the War Madge strongly disagreed with Harrisson's proposal to work with the MoI; he wrote to Harrisson in January 1940:

"I see grave danger of it becoming propagandist." <sup>165</sup>

For six months the two men argued bitterly, often in the form of long letters detailing each others' supposed short-comings. Harrisson alleged that Madge's work was uncoordinated and unsystematic, that Madge had neglected his diarists, that he had made no attempt to coordinate his diarists' work with the Bolton project. Madge's heart, according to Harrisson, was not in his work, whereas, Harrisson wrote,

"For me, M-O has become practically an obsession, and I am really not interested in anything else at the moment." <sup>166</sup>

According to Madge, Harrisson not only wanted to be the sole boss of M-O, he also had wider ambitions. He liked to dazzle Sir Richard Acland and his Parliamentary cronies, and wanted to turn M-O into a Political movement in its own right. Harrisson denied these charges, claiming that since War broke out he had tried to be especially democratic in his administration of M-O and had curtailed his authoritarian tendencies. He claimed that he was flabbergasted by the

allegation that he wanted to turn M-O into a political party, but it is clear that Madge was worried by M-O's movement into the centre of wartime radicalism. In 1940, none of the various discontents were articulated in party form but it was clear that there was a strong political feeling held in common by certain closely associated groups and individuals. Madge cannot have been reassured when Harrison wrote to him:

"I think it is just conceivable if a constituency offered me a one hundred per cent safe seat, free of all expense, and allowed me to stand as an independent without any policy except trying to really represent the opinion of the whole constituency in Parliament, that I might, provided that I didn't have to take any whip or work more than I wanted to on it, accept nomination as a candidate." 167

Such circumstances might now sound unlikely, but in 1940, anything was possible, as Tom Harrison was, no doubt, well aware. I have mentioned the more serious aspects of the argument between Madge and Harrison; there was much petty abuse and the conflict was as much as anything one of personality. Madge would appear to have been at that time a quiet man living a troubled personal life. Harrison was arrogant and full of energy: you either got on with him or you gave up. Madge gave up. For some months Madge had been in contact with J.M. Keynes, and largely due to Keynes' influence he was able to set up a research project on wartime domestic economics for the Institute of Economic and Social Research. A book resulted, War-time Patterns of Saving and Spending. 168 Madge later became Professor of Sociology at the University of Birmingham. From mid-1940, therefore, Harrison was in sole charge of Mass-Observation.

We have seen above M-O's wartime work on morale for the MoI, creating, as they called it, a 'war barometer'. M-O's second major War project was a study of the social effects of aerial bombardment. As Willcock wrote:

"M-O is particularly concerned with people's behaviour, their subjective feelings, their worries, frustrations, hopes, desires and fears ... The Blitz period, despite and even partly because of its human tragedies, was a field day for M-O." 169

M-O were employed to write factual accounts of what they saw and heard on the spot during all major incidents of violence inflicted on civilians, their reports being submitted to the MoI and to the Director of Naval Intelligence in the Admiralty, who had a special interest in the effects of bombing on morale in Southern ports. The first occasion on which M-O carried out such a survey was the attack on Coventry on November, 1940 170. As Coventry was a relatively small city and as its centre was almost completely destroyed, the damage seemed all the greater and rumour spread faster. There was unprecedented dislocation and depression, and more terror, hysteria and neurosis than anywhere previously. Arrangements for casualties and for dealing with fire, gas and debris were efficient but there was no help forthcoming from the authorities to deal with the psychological problems of the homeless and the bereaved. M-O sent the Government an urgent report, which was not very well received, pointing out that at least 200,000 people were in a state of considerable distress following the raid: if Coventry had been bombed again the next night there would have been panic. M-O urged that more

help should be given to voluntary social workers, rest centres should be better sited and better equipped, greater help should be given to people to repair their houses and transport should be better organised. Further, people should be given the facts of the situation: exaggerated reports in the press of courage did not accord with the shocked mood of the people of Coventry. They wanted to be treated as responsible citizens who should know the facts, not fobbed off with concocted heroics. Above all, the press should not attribute to the public opinions which they did not hold. After the Coventry raid the Beaverbrook press had initiated a hate campaign, claiming that Coventry people were crying out for merciless reprisals on German cities. Harrison, by this time an experienced and eloquent broadcaster, was given the postscript time following the BBC six o'clock news. He took the opportunity to criticise Beaverbrook - not for the first, nor the last, time. M-O's Blitz reports reached Churchill himself and had a considerable impact, leading to major reforms in welfare provision for affected areas. But these reports, always produced soon after the attack had taken place, caused a lot of trouble for M-O on their way up to Churchill, arousing, particularly, the anger of Bevin and Morrison.

Just before war broke out, Harrison offered the 'Panel' of voluntary contributors a choice of either continuing to answer Directives or of writing day-to-day diaries, covering every aspect of their war-time lives. About 500 at some time during the War wrote a diary, while over 2000 answered at least one Directive; some did both. Some contributors sent in only one report, some ceased writing if they were drafted overseas and a few were killed. It seems, however, that the vast majority continued their association with M-O for several months and a very sizeable group carried on for years. There would be a number of questions in each month's Directive. For example, in June, 1942, there were questions on people's attitudes to 'obscenity and swearing', 'glass objects', the desirability of invading Europe, and the cost of living. The Directives were divided into three sections; one for everyone to answer, one for those with extra time and one for those with access to special information. Panel members were also quick to volunteer information; for example many teachers sent in accounts of the evacuation of their schools. Some information from these diaries and reports was used in the preparation of reports for the MoI, but Tom Harrison has since written that ninety-nine per cent of the material was never touched.

The war-time diarists and Directive respondents were the same sort of people, with the same sorts of background, occupational, political and religious, as had first given their support to M-O in 1937.<sup>171</sup> It seems likely that the crisis of 1936-39 and of the early years of the war had a particular impact on the lower middle class. This was not a crisis of class antagonism, indeed it tended to draw classes together.<sup>172</sup> The crisis called for, and received, a populist response, one in which many lower middle class people could feel fully involved without having to cast aside what they saw as their own, separate concerns in the interests of the working class. Involvement in M-O was one means of articulating their concern; other means were voting for Independent candidates in war-time by-elections, for the Common Wealth Party and, in 1945, for Labour.

Throughout the War M-O prepared hundreds of special reports. It is impossible to list even a representative selection here; a selection made by Tom Harrison in 1960 is included in the Appendices. Along with these special reports each full-time observer covered one

particular topic for the duration of the War. Topics covered included: Fashion, Women, Radio, Films, Music Hall, Theatre, Art, Religion, Economics, ARP, Political Organisations. Further, M-O moved into the business, which had originated with groups such as FEP in the thirties, of preparing long, detailed reports on particular problems, reports laid out in the manner of Parliamentary reports and carrying a similar impression of weight. One example of this work is People in Production, prepared, significantly, for the Advertising Service Guild in 1942 and published, again significantly, in Penguin Special.<sup>173</sup> Again, this project was full of the rhetoric of wartime radicalism and also goes a long way to indicating the limits of that radicalism, or at least to indicating how it could be taken up and remoulded in the post-war world. The report dealt with the human problems of industry, with the various factors which, by lowering industrial workers' morale, restricted production. M-O criticised leadership of both management and trade unions for their allegedly antiquated attitudes, for continuing to fight a class war instead of coming together to fight Fascism. As might be expected, M-O found that ordinary people had different ideas. They wrote:

"All through we find industry, in all leadership sections on both sides, thinking predominantly in terms of the return to something like the pre-war structure, whereas the rank and file (and most other sections of the community) are tending more and more to think in other terms." 174

M-O emphasised the need for widespread restructuring of leadership:

"... the particular problems on the leadership side are the problems of women. Yet these problems are being handled by men, mainly men with specialised education and outlook; the handling suffers in consequence. The general absence of younger persons of either sex in areas of decision and administration is also noticeable in every aspect of war production." 175

Above all, M-O emphasised the need to look after the welfare of workers:

"If an offensive spirit is required in Britain as a whole, it is most certainly required on that side of our war production effort generally known as "welfare" ... important initial advances have been made. But it cannot be said that they have been so rapid, or so extensive as had been hoped or as is necessary, if we are to have total war mobilisation - which means a good deal more than mobilising the total number of machine tools. It's the woman who works the machine tool. It's the mind and heart and hope of the woman ... The financial and economic approach is essential, but over and over again it ignores the central fact that work is done by people, and money is paid to people, the time is lost by people, some people are going to lose the war and some people are going to win it." 176

For M-O the problems of industry were also those of politics. The old forms, which had, in the interwar years, given rise to class conflict and to the virtual death of Parliamentary democracy, were still powerful, and would remain powerful after the War unless populist, democratic policies were adopted during the War. In People in Production M-O commented on the Grantham by-election of March 1942, the first of a series of by-elections to be won by Independent candidates:



"There is no one more initially advantaged today than a distinguished Air Marshall (Air Marshall Sir Arthur Longmore) but he was beaten in a "safe" Conservative seat, by the Managing Director of a local works. Mr Kendall (Independent) is an industrialist of the rather "enlightened" type described in this report. Young and vigorous, he stood on a party production "platform" but did not blame any particular section of the community as responsible for inefficiency production. He stressed rather the high degree of efficiency operating in his own factory, where, for instance, as well as a first class canteen there is a fine "social hall" with a dance floor, daily danced on by many-workers during the lunch hour. Grantham is only one expression of a wide dilemma. Many people are feeling less and less attached to the old structure of industry, which is also very much the structure of party politics (Con. vs. Lab.). Yet the structure remains... and people and groups controlling it (minority though they often are) have power .... far beyond their numbers." 177

From the Munich Crisis onwards M-O covered nearly every by-election. In 1970, Tom Harrisson wrote:

"Looking back over those reports, one is struck by the large number of votes which were obtained by individual amateurs against the National Government Coalition of accepted parties, with control of all the machines and reflecting total "national unity". " 178.

One such amateur was M-O's old friend, Tom Driberg. 179

Throughout this time M-O worked hard on their methods of political prediction in the face of growing opposition from more professional and scientific organisations. Tom Harrisson always maintained that his was the more reliable approach and in justification pointed to M-O's work on the 1945 General Election. Like Picture Post and the Daily Mirror, M-O got it right as much through their involvement in wartime radicalism as through their particular public opinion polling methods. But of course their very methods were a major part of their contribution to the documentary movement, the methods and the politics were inextricably one thing and made up the whole. In the post-war years, as M-O became increasingly a commercially oriented market research organisation, they changed their methods, relying much more on direct interviewing and questionnaires, instead of what is known in the trade as 'indirect interviewing'; that is long, unstructured discussions and observation. Mass-Observation's wartime methods necessitated their being part of the people, in amongst the people.

Harrisson was quite right to pride himself on his political analysis of the War years. Not only did he predict a Labour victory but he knew why Labour would win. In January, 1943, Orwell wrote:

"Well, the crisis is over and the forces of reaction have won hands down." 180

A year later, in an article in the Political Quarterly, Harrisson predicted that the Tories would lose the next election "unless the alternatives commit suicide", and went on to give an acute analysis of popular feeling:

"Anxiety for the future expresses itself in the political sphere in a focusless striving towards something new and as yet unformulated and unled. About two out of every five people today feel that their political outlook has changed since the War began. So far as it has any direction at all this change is predominantly leftward, hardly ever rightward. But much of it is a change from vague apathy to equally vague unrest and disquiet; and little of the leftward change is party ward. Overwhelmingly, it is a change towards wanting things different, as yet directed onto no party, no persons, no leader ... The leaderless urge for change has found temporary focus at various times; in independent by-election candidates, in Sir Stafford Cripps, in the Archbishop of Canterbury for instance. For one reason and another, but chiefly because no-one has yet given immediate tangible proof that they are really going to do something to make things different, these figures have only filled the gap for a few short periods. In the Services all the signs indicate that the want of a focus for forward thinking is even more urgent. A survey ... showed that four out of five thought no existing party could do things as they wanted after the War. Half of the very small minority who had faith in any party placed it in the Communists." 181

In 1945 only the wartime radicals, many of whom had in the late 1930's been part of the documentary movement, expected Labour to win. The Labour leadership did not expect victory, nor did Churchill expect defeat.<sup>182</sup> In a long analysis of the election result and its causes M-O concluded that the vote for Labour was a worried, anxious, leaderless electoral decision.<sup>183</sup> It was, however, rooted in the public's long memory; they would neither forget nor forgive the shoddy treatment they had received at the hands of Chamberlain and his backers in Fleet Street. M-O had analysed reactions to Munich, to the Phoney War, to the crisis of 1940; M-O itself had, in a small way, done something to channel that reaction; it had been part of the people during the war and therefore knew which way the people would vote when war ended. M-O summed up the 1945 Election thus;

"The major part of the Labour vote was registered as a 'last hope', was a vote for change from the old prewar insecurities and a swing away from the past rather than a swing towards understood principles and approved leadership." 184

## 7. THE INCORPORATION OF RADICALISM

By 1945, Tom Harrisson the last remaining founder of M-O, had left the organisation. Late in 1942 he joined the army as a private and spent a year in a camp in Yorkshire, in what spare time he had overseeing the publication of the one book to come out of the Worktown project, The Pub and the People. In 1943 Harrisson was given a commission; he joined Special Operations Executive and the following year parachuted into Japanese-occupied Borneo to establish a resistance movement. Apart from occasional trips to Europe, he stayed in the Far East for the next twenty five years. Harrisson later said that he left M-O because official pressure grew too great. There were rumours, later proved to be unfounded, that Churchill had had Priestley

taken off the air; the Daily Mirror's Cassandra had been conscripted following threats to close the paper; Harrison had run foul of Bevin, Beaverbrook and Morrison, a powerful trio. Further, according to Harrison, M-O was becoming too much a part of Government, something he was not prepared to countenance.<sup>185</sup> The incorporation of M-O into the new centre of power was, to some extent, inevitable. The Cultural History Group of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies have written;

"Not being sharply defined, nor standing as a clear threat to established power, war radicalism was readily adaptable because of its very vagueness and plasticity." <sup>186</sup>

Mass-Observation was part of the documentary movement which itself gave expression to, and was an essential part of, wartime radicalism. It was, however, a movement which, as Stuart Hall has explained:

"Without the benefit of conscious radical leadership and articulation, would crest and find its limits." <sup>187</sup>

In 1938, Harrison and Madge had written:

"The function of M-O is to get written down the unwritten laws and to make the invisible forces visible." <sup>188</sup>

It is Stuart Hall's contention that the documentary movement as a whole ultimately lacked the necessary language and political consciousness to make invisible social relations visible.

M-O also had other links to the 1930's. By 1940 its fragile links with the left intellectuals of the mid-1930's, to Surrealism and to Marxism, had been broken; Jennings had left before the War broke out, Madge soon after the start of the War. Madge's departure (as, later, was Harrison's) was due, to a large extent, to his realisation that M-O stood in danger of cementing its ties to other less acceptable aspects of the thirties' 'need to know'. In WPCS 9 we wrote:

"... the State had to organise both the economy and the mobilisation of the population as a whole; the first task required the direct involvement of the unions in meeting production targets, the second necessitated education of troops and civilians alike into 'citizenship'

.... Yet while the situation's logic demanded such developments, they could not be introduced without difficulty; their implementation had to be negotiated." <sup>189</sup>

Mass-Observation played a significant part in this negotiation: it was in many ways, the perfect arbitrator, a ready-made go-between. M-O showed the Government what the people wanted and advised the Government how best to put over its policies to the people. M-O's concern for welfare was a concern for the people, certainly not a concern for the resultant profit, yet the insights M-O offered to Government officials were also insights available to post-war industrialists. Yet in the early years of the War M-O did manage to keep its independence and played a central part in changing Government attitudes and policies. Harrison's ambition, stated in 1940, to be able to tell the truth after the War, was fulfilled; M-O retained the rights to all the work they did for the MoI and Naval Intelligence and never signed the Official Secrets Act. M-O succeeded, therefore, in its stated aim of forming a bridge between leaders and led in the interests of the people. Above all, M-O remained part of the people, yet here lies its ultimate paradox. Without being part of the people, M-O could not have been successful, but being successful meant, eventually, not only ushering in a more aware social democracy but also

a more aware and more consumer oriented business system. Julian Symons has written of M-O:

"It was not the masses who had fun with the new science, but science which had its own sort of fun with the masses." 190

Symons' comment refers, inappropriately, to the late 1930's. By the mid-1940's there is more than a grain of truth in it, although not until 1949 was it fully true.

#### 8. THE POST-WAR WORLD: MARKET RESEARCH AND THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

From 1943 M-O began to work on the problems of post-war reconstruction, investigating public attitudes to housing, social services, education and health. When the War began M-O was an amateur organisation, living on gifts from the benevolent rich and on the proceeds of Harrisson's talks on cannibals. By 1945 it was an established research organisation, but as the War came to an end so did much of M-O's work for the Government. To survive it had to make headway in the field of commercial research in which, in the immediate post-war years, there was a tremendous boom. Those research organisations which had been tied up with Government work during the War, now all scrambled for the commercial work. Consumer industries were desperate to know what six years of war had done to their markets, so there was plenty of business to go round, at least for the first two or three years. M-O had done some market research before the War, largely as a result of the dire need for money, although it is undeniable that in carrying out such market research work in 1938 and 1939 M-O betrayed the trust of the voluntary observers. Mass-Observation's market research techniques were not those of the major established organisations. In an investigation for Lintas on social attitudes to margarine, carried out in 1938, M-O had written:

"It is worth noticing that the answers from mass observers are of a lucid and revealing quality quite different from the bald replies obtained by ordinary market research interviewing techniques." 191

M-O claimed that their techniques gained greater insight into consumers' tastes, just as they claimed that their observational and indirect methods of opinion gauging were more accurate than purely quantified, direct interview, Gallup-style, opinion polling. The competition in the years following the War was severe and much of it came from established, large-scale commercial organisations. Something like a concerted attack was mounted on M-O's research techniques, and an attack which M-O struggled to withstand. One of the most direct attacks came from Mark Abrams in 1950.<sup>192</sup> For Abrams true social survey was a quantitative study of a defined group of people with the aim of analysing a particular social problem, isolating its causes and indicating a solution: it was not a vague, qualitative study of 'ordinary people', merely for the sake of what he termed 'abstract knowledge'. Opinion polling should be similarly quantitative and, following their failure to predict correctly the result of the 1948 Presidential Election, American opinion pollsters were devising more scientific methods, such as the Quintamensional Plan of Question Design (sic), developed by Gallup.<sup>193</sup> Such a new techniques were, in fact, M-O's methods hiding behind a fancy name: pollsters had realised that direct interviewing, with fixed questions requiring a 'yes' or 'no' answer, was inadequate.



In a small book on social survey, in which no other person or organisation received more than four pages' attention, Abrams devoted thirteen pages to attacking Mass-Observation by name. When M-O adopted standard market research techniques and used direct interviews, their samples were too small. Their indirect interviewing was valueless as it was neither systematised nor controlled; interviewers were untrained and research directors had insufficient grasp of the subjects they were investigating. Participants' observation suffered from being limited in scope and from unconscious omission and distortion on the part of the observer. The diaries and the Panel were too middle class; they were not an adequate cross section of the population and not even an adequate cross section of the middle class. As Abrams put it:

"It is likely that the average man in the street would regard the M-O volunteer as a bit of a crank." 194

Lastly, it was impossible to analyse such qualitative material scientifically. No two analysts would draw the same conclusions. Abrams concluded:

"In short the methods are inchoate and uncontrolled, and this is perhaps the biggest disappointment about the work of the innovators. In thirteen years of prolific activity they have contributed nothing that can be called a scientific method of content analysis - the process which aims at a quantitative classification of a given body of content in terms of a system of categories devised to yield data relevant to specific hypotheses concerning the content." 195

M-O tried to defend itself, issuing publicity sheets announcing:

"(M-O's)...Services are available to any individual or organisation ... M-O clients have included government departments, advertising agencies, railway companies, manufacturers of patent medicines, food manufacturers, retail establishments." 196

Willcock defended his middle class Panel in a manner which can have cut little ice with commercial concerns in a hurry for quick results. He wrote:

"It is quite impossible to recruit a panel which is 'representative' of the general population for the simple reason that large sectors of the population are not of the type who would be interested in such work, or capable of carrying it out. But a 'representative' sample is of little value if its 'representativeness' consists only in characteristics of sex, age, income, voting behaviour and all the rest. If its verbal statements consist largely of truisms and the repetition of socially respectable opinions and attitudes, a sample which is a perfect microcosm of the population still reflects only the topmost level of social talk. An imperfect sample which tells the 'truth' provides data of far greater objective value than a perfect sample which skims the surface of safe conversation." 197

It is clear that M-O was caught between its functions of ten years previously, a populist, documentary vision, a science of ourselves, and its new role as a government social survey unit and a commercial market research organisation. Throughout the late 1940's M-O continued to carry out documentary and academic investigations as can be seen

from the selection of the topics they covered given in the Appendices, but their ultimate handicap in a competitive commercial world was precisely this lingering sense of principle their past. As Bob Willcock explained in 1947:

"In M-O greatest stress is laid on the necessity for retaining copyright on work done, and the right to publish results as and when publication seems desirable. On several occasions M-O could have obtained life-long security and prosperity by selling its services to clients who would have kept the results for their own private use. Such suggestions are invariably turned down, because M-O does not consider that its job ends with the collection of information. It believes that the real job of sociology only begins there. The circulation and the wide dissemination of fact is of paramount importance and through its work in this direction M-O believes that it has contributed in some small measure towards a greater social consciousness not only at the professional level of scientist, politician and journalist, but also among ordinary men and women in their everyday lives..." 198

In the late 1960's and 1970's Tom Harrisson often returned to this argument between market research methods and M-O's technique, always believing that his was the correct approach. By that time, the early gloss had worn off market research and their brash, self-confident claims of the post-war years now sounded hollow. In 1950 Abrams had written:

"Armed with the results (of quantitative social surveys) successive governments have destroyed the conditions described .... There is no longer in Britain any minority group whose health suffers from an inadequate diet..."

Harrisson continued to claim that the best way to ascertain both public and private opinion was to observe people and for people to observe themselves. He wrote in the early 1970's:

"...it is natural enough for social scientists to push themselves away from the full subject matter and to develop artificial stranger situations in order to try to offset the natural conflict between subjective and objective states on the part of the investigator. Despite some initial difficulties, it becomes easier to put everything in terms of questions, which can be answered either orally or postally and which results can be organised, tabulated or otherwise given some form (preferably statistical) which can then be taken to be 'scientific' and therefore reasonably accurate...Interviewing, statistical sampling and all the associated jargon ... has led a large sector of public thinking up the garden path that narrows as you proceed and ends in the rubbish dump..." 200

Harrisson was particularly gratified by the opinion polls' failure to predict correctly the result of the 1970 General Election; the polls had only managed to identify the superficial public mood in the early summer of 1970. Harrisson was amused at the polls' attempt to account for their failure by suggesting that the electorate had changed their minds in the time between Heath's "At a Stroke" pronouncement and polling day. In Harrisson's view, the voters'

behaviour in 1970 was very much akin to their behaviour in 1945. They were not voting for any new ideal, certainly not for Selsdon Man, but they had memories which went back beyond Jenkins' managed economic upturn of 1969 and 1970 to Callaghan's debacle of 1967, just as voters in 1945 remembered Chamberlain's neglect and indifference of 1936 - 1940. Harrisson was sure that had M-O carried out a study of electoral opinion in 1970 they would have got it right.<sup>201</sup> Of course, we cannot tell, but we can say that Harrisson's strictures against quantitative market research and social survey methods do now seem, to some extent, justified. Mass-Observation did not fulfill Harrisson's ambition of creating a new philosophical synthesis, but neither did quantitative research right all the social problems it tackled. The analytic visions of both quantitative research and M-O were, and are, inadequate; yet in retrospect, Mass-Observation's populist, qualitative approach was in many ways the more imaginative, and clearly the more noble, method.

### IN CONCLUSION

In 1947, Bob Willcock left M-O and joined the Government Social Survey Unit. In 1949, Tom Harrisson exchanged his rights to M-O in return for control of all pre-1949 material; Mass-Observation Ltd, still exists today as a quite independent market research organisation. Between 1947 and 1966, Harrisson was Government Ethnologist and Curator of the Museum of Sarawak, involved in diverse scientific pursuits, studying turtles' breeding habits, working on archaeological digs looking for Stone Age Man, making a film study of Sarawak swifts for which he, along with Hugh Gibb, won the Eurovision Grand Prix. In 1966, he was appointed Visiting Professor of anthropology at Cornell University, a job he soon passed on to his ex-wife. In 1967, Harrisson returned to England and deposited all pre-1949 Mass-Observation material in Sussex University. In 1975, he deeded the material to the University and was given a Chair. He intended to sort through all the material and to write a series of books; only one was written, Living Through the Blitz. In January 1976, Tom Harrisson and his wife were killed in a motor accident near Bangkok.

Harrisson left a quite remarkable collection of material, which is now slowly and carefully being catalogued, preserved and microfilmed at Sussex University. Included in the Appendices is a list of what M-O called 'File Reports', these being short reports, written up but not published. These reports were based on a minute part of the raw material now in the Archive. There are over a thousand File Reports and over a thousand boxes of raw material, each box containing at least five hundred sheets. In all, M-O published only twenty-six books and pamphlets, and while Tom Harrisson was in control, only twelve.

Most comments on M-O have been based on a cursory reading of only two or three pre-war books. There is no history of M-O, and it will be a long time before anyone gets to grips with the full extent of the material in the Archive. When a full history does appear it will be clear that M-O was far from being a curious little literary movement, tacked on the end of the 1930's; it was a considerable organisational and intellectual achievement on the part of a group of talented people, most notably among them being Tom Harrisson, a major component of a crucially important structure of feeling and a tribute to the good will of the hundreds of people who collectively constituted Mass-Observation.

## APPENDIX 1. TOPIC HEADINGS OF WORKTOWN AND HOLIDAY TOWN PROJECTS

### WORKTOWN

1. Politics:
  - i) Liberal Party. Young Liberals.
  - ii) Labour Party. Left Book Club. Irish Labour Party. Labour Club Garden Party. Bolton Labour Guild. Clarion Cycling Club. Communist Party.
  - iii) Conservative Club. Junior Imperial League.
  - iv) Facists.
  - v) Municipal Politics. By election.
2.
  - i) Trade Unions: Fishfryers. Operative Bolton Spinners. National Spinsters. Mental Hospital Workers. Bolton Trades Council.
  - ii) Strikes: Co-op clerks, de Havilland Transport workers, Apprentices. Leatherworkers.
3. Religion:

18 Religious Sects. Church buildings, graveyards etc. Special occasions - weddings, funerals, christenings, religious festivals. Religious publications. Sunday activities.
4.
  - A. Money matters:
    - i) Saving and spending
    - ii) Household Budgets.
  - B. Shopping:
    - i) Shopkeepers, Co-operatives. Markets. Woolworths and Marks and Spencers. Chamber of Trade.
    - ii) Christmas shopping
    - iii) Shopping for food
    - iv) January sales
5. Reports on:

Jazz, Cinema, Posters, Radio, Newspapers, Police Court Cases, Public Health and Housing, R.S.P.C.A St. John's Ambulance, Mental Health. The Cotton Industry. Life in the factory. Refugees. History of Bolton.
6. Short Reports:

Billy's Weekly Liar, Temperance, Women's Citizens Association. Houses in Everyday Life. Happy Homes Exhibition. Dog Pound. Pre-holiday week. Photographs. Conversations, Bolton Evening News, Trams, China Relief, Y.M.C.A, Bolton Police Week, Dirty Jokes, Unemployment, Art, Bolton Museum. The Citizen, Drunks, Ballet, Weather Motory Club, Wigan Slasher, Public Library, Valentines Day, Irish Haymaking, Annual Chrysanthemum Show, A Brush with Bureaucrats, Pets, Rags and bones, New Year's Eve, 1937, Armistice Day, Coronation Day, April Fool's day, Saints' Days, Egg rolling ceremony, Civic processions and garden parties. May Day reports, Spring, West Houghton Wakes Christmas
7. Wartime Bolton:

Wartalk, spy scares, A.R.P. Crises, Norway, Belgium, France.



APPENDIX 2. SELECTION OF WAR-TIME FILE REPORTS.

Year 1939

1. Channels of Publicity
2. Government Posters
3. Public Information Leaflets
4. A.R.P. Instructions
6. Sport in War-time
9. Six Railway Posters
11. Evacuation
14. Christmas Shopping

197. Propaganda Ideas
210. Arrest of an Observer
225. International Use of M-O
226. French Armistice

Year 1941

16. Faking of Newsreels
20. Recording the War
23. Church - Religion and the War
24. The Cinema
26. Women's Organisations
28. Fashion
30. Shop Notices
33. Music Halls
44. Astrology
45. Pantomime
47. War-time Reading
51. Work's Magazines
58. Pantomime and Music Hall
65. Lord Haw Haw
66. Films Response
71. The Lightship Leaflet
73. Norway Crisis
77. Gert and Daisy (BBC Talks)
78. Anti-Semitism in Limehouse
79. Public Feelings about Aliens
85. Budget Reactions
86. War and Learned Societies
87. What Children think about War
88. Argyll By-Election
89. Morale Now
99. Political Crisis
120. Ministry of Food Publicity Campaign
122. Duff Cooper's Broadcast
135. Mosley Internment
136. Street Literature
139. Class and Sex Differences in Morale
140. Women's Attitudes to Evacuation
144. Publication of German Communiques
150. Air Raid Fear
152. War Work and Local Authorities
170. Suffolk Village
172. A.R.P. Preparedness
177. War Jokes

234. Royal Family
238. Refugees
305. Unintelligible Words (in Official Propaganda)
311. Does Public Opinion Count?
312. Conscientious Objectors
313. Civilians in Air Raids
314. Newsreels
325. "Cooper's Snooters"
329. Hore-Belisha
346. British Israelites
347. Hyde Park Meeting
479. Messerschmitt in Streatham
482. The Third Evacuation
489. Non-Physical Ear Plug Problems
495. Coventry
496. Wartime Politics
534. Lundy - Isle of Puffins
551. Reactions to Boothby
552. "Daily Worker"
553. Young People
563. Derby
564. Jehovah's Witnesses
566. The French
567. Carrots
568. Morale in 1941
569. Airman
584. Wearing White in Blackout
585. Rumour at Cambridge
586. Invasion Feelings
651. Questions in the Public Mind
652. Budget
653. Leisure in R.A.F.
658. Easter Sunday
659. Sleep
661. The Small Shopkeeper
662. Poison Gas
694. Demand for Reprisals
695. Hess?
722. Social Welfare and Blitz Towns
723. Civilian and Service Morale
727. Liverpool Seamen
769. Mass Astrology
773. War in M-O Diaries
774. Clothes Rationing
776. Smoking Habits
782. Sex Differences in Overheads
807. Post-War Prospects and Demobilisation

808. Habit Changes  
 838. Provincial Dogs  
 869. Salvaging History  
 870. Home Propaganda  
 871. Government Exhibitions  
 932. Clyde Situation  
 933. Street Literature  
 934. Effect of War on Happiness  
 999. American Tinned Food  
 1005. Rumours  
 1022. How Britain Eats  
 1023. Two Blitz Occasions  
 1024. Liberalism  
 1083. Summary on A.T.S Campaign  
 1084. Supply to Production  
 1085. Dislike of Ministers  
 1088. Expectations of 1942  
 1093. Ministry of Production  
 1094. Feelings about Australians  
 1111. Opinion on Cabinet Changes  
 1112. Closing of Small shops  
 1149. Greyhounds and National Unity  
 1162. Propaganda for Town Planning  
 1166. Sir Stafford Cripps  
 1196. Blaina Investigations  
 1198. M. of I. Shorts  
 1207. Prestige of Government Leaders  
 1209. Ignorance  
 1210. Opposite Sex and War Difficulties  
 1211. Port of Hull  
 1225. Rubber Salvage  
 1226. Uncommon Sense  
 1266. Clogs  
 1267. Political Truce  
 1268. Traditional English Sunday  
 1269. Post-War Education  
 1301. Heated People  
 1306. Americans in Ireland  
 1309. Ulster Shipping  
 1311. Morale on Corvette  
 1314. Marginal Creative Personnel  
 1611. Women in Pubs  
 1612. Religion and the Future  
 1622. Factors in Home Building  
 1789. Demobilisation  
 1791. Browning Off No 1  
 1843. Tube Investments  
 1844. By-Elections Feb - June 1943  
 1846. Public Feeling about the Dutch  
 1924. Strikes in War-time  
 1947. Happiness in War-Time  
 1948. Tube Dwellers  
 1949. Morale in September  
 1967. The Foundation of a Successful marriage  
 1968. Who'll Win?  
 Year 1944  
 2205. Sex Morality and the Birth Rate  
 2207. V2 - Report on South-East London  
 2220. British Legion Competition Essays  
 2221. Duke of Windsor's Resignation  
 2229. Death of Roosevelt  
 2230. R.A.F Exhibition at Dorland Hall  
 2231. Do People Tell the Truth?  
 2233. Preliminary Figures for Domestic Science in Schools  
 2259. Attitudes to the Liberal Party  
 2260. Politicians' Prestige  
 2269. Retailers and Condition Medicines  
 2271. Russia Declares War on Japan  
 2272. Public Reactions to the Atom Bomb  
 2278. Feelings about the Peace  
 2285. Women's Reasons for having Small Families  
 2286. Prisoners of War  
 2291. Dock Strike  
 2301. Attitudes to Russia  
 2302. Trends in By-Elections  
 Year 1943  
 1568. Public Reactions to the Beveridge Report  
 1569. America and The Americans  
 1593. The Sort of Home the Englishman Wants  
 1594. Food Indirects  
 1599. Public and V.D.  
 1610. Watford By-Election

# APPENDIX 3. SELECTION OF POST-WAR FILE REPORTS

Year 1946

- 2363. Modern Homes Exhibition (Note and Counts)
- 2370. World Organisation and the Future
- 2375. Stevenage Satellite Town
- 2387. Salvation Army
- 2388. Drinking Habits
- 2394. Black Widow Posters
- 2395. Holiday Weather
- 2405. People Feel:1939-1945
- 2411. Anti-Semitism and Free Speech
- 2424. Trade Unions and Closed Shop
- 2425. Paratroops Mutiny
- 2426. Implications of Peckham
- 2427. Famous People
- 2430. The Hotel Strike
- 2431. The Squatters
- 2432. Popular Attitudes to Palestine and Arab Countries
- 2536. Charity and the Blind
- 2537. Reading in Tottenham
- 2538. An Interim Report on Gambling
- 2546. The Application of Face Cream
- 2547. Custard Powder
- 2549. Anatomy of "Don't Knows"
- 2553. Willesden and the New Towns

- 2558. Manpower Movements
- 2560. Mass-Gambling
- 2575. Marshall Plan
- 2577. Football Pools
- 2998. Princess Margaret Rose
- 2999. Trade Unions
- 3000. Political Film Campaign
- 3001. Three Surveys on Capital Punishment
- 3002. Embarrassments
- 3006. Hat Wearing Habits
- 3008. Who are the Astrologers?
- 3012. Children out of School
- 3017. Employment of Women
- 3018. Opinion Forming
- 3027. Church Going
- 3030. Mantelpieces
- 3036. Queueing
- 3037. Pattern of Smoking Habits
- 3038. Standards of Living
- 3045. British Sport
- 3065. Home Decorating and Repairing
- 3066. Party Games
- 3073. The Middle Class

Year 1947

- 2450. Coffee Drinking
- 2451. Biscuits
- 2454. Anti-Americanism
- 2460. People in the Co-op
- 2461. Southern Railway
- 2465. "Pseudo-personality" in Prostitution
- 2466. Political Parties: Oxford Undergraduates
- 2467. Leisure - Saturday Night
- 2468. Fuel Crisis - Gains and Losses
- 2477. Usage and Abusage
- 2480. Legend of Lorna Doone
- 2485. Atomic Weather
- 2491. Deserters
- 2492. Book Buying Habits
- 2494. Landlords Opinions on the Prospect of a penny on the Pint
- 2495. The State of Matrimony
- 2496. Shopping Hours
- 2497. The British Household
- 2498. Sunday School and Church Attendance
- 2508. Aspects of Charities
- 2509. Holidays
- 2535. A Report on Popular Photographs

- 3085. The E.s.d of Home Saving
- 3086. Living-making in Public
- 3087. Trade Marks
- 3091. Contemporary Churchgoing
- 3095. The New Look
- 3096. Dreams
- 3097. Baby Foods
- 3098. A Washing Machine
- 3105. Radio Listening and Attitudes towards Rediffusion
- 3106. Television Beginnings
- 3107. Ideal Families
- 3108. Chemist Shops
- 3109. National Health Service
- 3131. Paint, Colour and the Housewife
- 3140. The National Health Service
- 3142. Meet Yourself on Sundays

Year 1949

- 3143. Washing Habits
- 3150. Teenage Girls
- 3162. Radio Personalities
- 3180. The M.P. and His Constituency
- 3181. Soft Drinks
- 3183. New Year Resolutions
- 3190. Worming Medicines (Dogs)
- 3192. Man and his Cigarette
- 3371. Heaviness of Beers and Stouts
- 3387. Electric Clocks
- 3390. Going to London Zoo
- 3392. Commodity Survey
- 3395. Laundry Customers
- 3399. Foundation Garments
- 3401. Buying at Chemists
- 3410. Recognition of Rayon
- 3424. Proprietary Medicines
- 3425. Glassware

#### Year 1950

##### 3200. Upper and Middle Class

Soup Eating Habits

3201. Retailer Attitudes

3202. Sweet Pickles

3210. Toilet Preparations for Men

3211. National Lotteries

3220. Shampoos (for Dogs)

3231. Courtesy Shopping

3242. Filter Tip Cigarettes

3244. Some Attitudes to Life

3245. Cookers (electric)

3249. Four Years of Squatting

3255. "In a Plain Envelope"

3258. Music Hall Humour

3259. Army and Navy Stores

3261. Breakfast Menus

3280. Crying at the Pictures

3284. Members of Parliament

3291. Listening to Music

3295. Three Orange Squashes -

A Taste Test

#### Year 1953

3441. Home Sewing

3447. Nylons

3453. Shaving Market

3455. Television Set Buying

3465. Free Enterprise

3466. Cod Fillets

3475. Clarks of Retford

3480. Laundry Summary Report

#### Year 1955

3540. Design Leadership

3546. 365 Handkerchiefs

3555. Clarks of Retford - Customer

Survey

3560. Suet

3562. Furnishing fabrics

3570. Recruitment of Dentists

3571. Jewelry Sales

3572. Cameras

3576. Rediffusion - lost customer

3597. Water Heaters

#### Year 1952

3361. Baby Cereals

#### Year 1956

3600. Capital Punishment

3610. Fish Liver Oils

3614. Drapers Chamber of Trade

3639. The Market for Furniture



3646. Baked Beans  
 3652. Frozen Fish  
 3654. Ford's - Prefect and Anglia  
 3660. Prestige Advertising  
 3366. Southern Region British Railways  
 3367. Dyes  
 3670. Attitudes to Stout  
 3671. Men's Shoes  
 3672. Peace and the Public  
 3674. Boys' Shirts  
 3675. Attitudes of Youth Middle Class Dog Owners  
 3681. Cosmetics  
 3690. Travel Sickness  
 3705. Design Centre  
 3711. Housewife's Day 1956  
 3713. London Hotels  
 3730. Circuses  
 3752. Branded Food Products  
 3753. Dry Cleaning

Year 1958

3756. Personality Types and Smoking  
 3762. Saturday Reading Of Newspapers  
 3767. Coffee  
 3769. Glucose Products  
 3772. Cigarettes (Class "B")  
 3775. Readership of University Students  
 3777. Pet Ownership Attitudes  
 3788. Why do Wives go to Work?  
 3790. Tableware  
 3817. Photographic Display  
 3818. Laundry Continuous Index

Year 1959

3825. Teenage Shirts  
 3828. Household Soap  
 3830. Foot Treatment  
 3831. Ice Cream  
 3835. Attitudes to Bread  
 3838. Bookshops  
 3840. Pork Joints  
 3863. Attitude to Gardening and Gardening Products  
 3871. Cats  
 3882. British Typewriters  
 3883. Pies and Sausages  
 3888. Instant Coffee

APPENDIX 4. MASS-OBSERVATION PUBLICATIONS.

- 1937 Mass-Observation by Charles Madge & Tom Harrisson  
(Frederick Muller Ltd.)
- 1937 May 12th (Coronation) by Charles Madge & Humphrey Jennings  
(Faber & Faber)
- 1938 First Years Work by C.M. & T.H. (Lindsay Drummond)
- 1939 Britain by C.M. & T.H. (Penguin Special)
- 1940 War Begins at Home (Chatto & Windus)
- 1941 Clothes Rationing (Advertising Service Guild) Change No. 1
- 1941 Home Propaganda (A.S.G.) Change No.2
- 1941 A Savings Survey (A.S.G.)
- 1942 People in Production (Penguin Special, also A.S.G.) Change No.3
- 1943 War Factory (Gollancz)
- 1943 People's homes (A.S.G.) Change No.4
- 1943 The Pub and the People (Gollancz)
- 1944 The Journey Home (A.S.G.)
- 1945 Britain and her Birthrate (A.S.G.)
- 1947 Puzzled People (Gollancz)
- 1947 Browns of Chester (Lindsay Drummond)
- 1947 Peace and the Public (Longmans)
- 1948 Juvenile Delinquency (Falcon Press)
- 1949 The Press and its Readers (Art and Technics Ltd)
- 1949 Meet Yourself on Sunday (Waldrett Press)
- 1949 Meet Yourself at the Doctors (Waldrett Press)
- 1949 People and Paint (I.C.I. Publications)
- 1950 The Voters Choice (Art and Technics Ltd.)
- 1961 Britain Revisited (Gollancz)
- 1966 Long to Reign Over Us by Leonard Harris (William Kimber)
- 1971 The Pub and the People (reprint with new introduction and  
photographs) (Seven Dials Press)
- 1975 Britain in the Thirties - Worktown by Camera (Unicorn Press,  
limited edition)
- 1976 Living Through the Blitz (Collins)
- \*\*\*\*\*

Certain other books have made substantial use of the Mass-Observation Archive, notably The People's War by Angus Calder (Panther 1971) and London Under Fire (Pan Books 1974) by Leonard Mosley. Consultation of the material was made in the preparation of several other books, including The Road to 1945 by Paul Addison (Jonathon Cape 1975), Astrology by Derek Parker (Eyre & Spottiswood 1970), How We Lived Then by Norman Longmate (Hutchison 1971) and Oswald Mosley (Macmillans 1975).

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Useful material about the ideas, history and techniques of Mass-Observation can be found in the introductions to M-O publications. A number of authors have made interesting references to M-O.

The Confidential Agent by Graham Greene (Heinemann 1939); The Divine Flame by Sir Alister Hardy (Collins 1966); Into This Dangerous World by Woodrow Wyatt (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1952); Indigo Days by Julian Trevelyan (McGibbon & Kee 1957); The Thirties by Malcolm Muggeridge (Collins 1969); The Thirties by Julian Symons (Cresset Press 1960); The Age of Illusion by R. Blythe (Hamish Hamilton 1963); Kingsley by C.H. Rolf (Gollancz 1973); The Land Unknown by Kathleen Rains (Hamish Hamilton 1973); The Auden Generation by S. Hynes (Bodley Head 1975); Modern Public Opinion by William Albright (McGraw-Hill 1953); The Tower of Babel by Eric Rhode (Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1966).

FOOTNOTES

1. New Statesman and Nation. 7.9.36. Pike himself was a remarkable man, who had founded a progressive school in Cambridge and later, as a wartime 'boffin', invented 'iceberg' ships for use during the D-Day landings. The decision to use 'mulberry harbour' instead was taken at the last minute and at the highest level. Before the War, Pike was a travelling speaker for the Left Book Club.
2. New Statesman and Nation 12.12.36. It is ironic, but perhaps helpful in gaining an impression of the weight which Pike's statement carried, that as I revise this paper for publication, the newspapers are full of pieces on Prince Charles, now thirty and not yet married. Will he go the way of Edward VIII? Enoch Powell warns that, should the Prince marry a Roman Catholic, the nation would be split asunder. Meanwhile, the television series 'Edward and Mrs Simpson', is a huge popular success.
3. Graves and Hodge. The Long Weekend. London 1940. Penguin 1971. pp. 356-370
4. Charles Hodge and Tom Harrison. Introductory Pamphlet: Mass-Observation. Frederick Muller. London 1937. p.10
5. Raymond William. George Orwell. Fontana Modern Masters.
6. For biographical information on Tom Harrison see. Tom Harrison The World Within. The Cresset Press. 1959. Timothy Green. The Adventurers. According to a letter to the TLS, 26.11.76, at the age of 20 Tom Harrison was one of the organisers of the 'historic' Greater Crested Grebe enquiry, in which Tom Harrison inspired and organised the efforts of 1300 voluntary observers. He conducted a correspondence of 5,000 letters and wrote to every well-known ornithologist in England. The TLS's correspondent wrote: "It is ironical that whereas the contribution of M-O to the development of social science proved to be ephemeral, the type of ornithological enquiry which Harrison pioneered has since emerged as the central technique of one area of field biology after another."
7. New Statesman and Nation. 2.1.37.
8. New Statesman and Nation. 30.1.37.
9. viz. Stevenson Social Conditions Between the Wars. Penguin Books 1977. pp.46-61.  
Mark Abrams Social Surveys and Social Action Heineman 1951
10. A.L.Bowley and A.R.Burnett-Hurst. Livelihood and Poverty. P.S.King and Son.1915  
A.L.Bowley Has Poverty Diminished. P.S.King and Son. 1905.  
B.S.Rowntree Poverty: A Study of Town Life. 1901  
B.S.Rowntree Poverty and Progress. Longmans 1944  
Charles Booth Life and Labour of the People of London Macmillan 17vols. 1892-1900  
Sir H.L.Smith The New Survey of London Life and Labour P.S.King and Son. 9vols. 1930-1935  
D.C.Jones The Social Survey of Merseyside. Liverpool University Press 3vols 1934.

P. Ford Work and Wealth at a Modern Port London 1934.  
Herbert Tout: Standard of Living in Bristol Bristol 1934.

11. Stevenson op cit p.50

12. for example: Pilgrim Trust: Becontree and Dagenham. A Report made for the Pilgrim Trust by Terence Young 1934.

Pilgrim Trust: Men Without Work 1938.

PEP : The Entrance to Industry. London 1935 (School to work)

PEP : The Exit from Industry. London 1935 (retirement)

PEP : Report on the British Press Etc... (London 1938)

PEP : Report on the British Social Services etc... London 1937

PEP : Report on the British Health Services etc... London 1937

PEP : Britain's Health Penguin Special 1939 based report on the British Health service.

The founding of the New Fabian Research Bureau and a general increase in research work within the Labour Party were reactions to the failure of the Labour Government of 1929-1931 to deal with the economic crisis and to Labour's consequent electoral defeat. Pimlott has shown how certain factions within the Labour Party realised that Labour's ability to govern and at the same time to deliver socialism, had lagged far behind the Party's electoral success. Any future Labour government should enter office fully conversant with the problems it would face. Ben Pimlott. Labour and the Left in the 1930's. Esp. Ch.2. Watershed.

13. For the 'new centre of British politics' see:

Angus Calder: The People's War

Paul Addison: The Road to 1945

Arthur Marwich: Britain in the Century of Total War

Arthur Marwich: Middle Opinion in the Thirties. English History Review. April 1964. Cultural History Group,

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Out of the People the Politics of Containment, 1935-1945.

Working Paper in Cultural Studies 9. Spring 1976. pp29-50.

14. Abrams op cit p61. Abrams also noted that 'Before the war, probably two thirds of all market research done in Britain was carried out by the market research departments of three advertising agents - London Press Exchange Ltd., J.Walter Thompson Co., and Lintas (Lever Bros) Ltd...' My remarks on market research in Britain between the wars are based on research carried out in the archives of these three agencies whom I should like to thank for allowing me to look at their archives for granting permission to quote from them.

15. For examples of press readership surveys in this period see: London Research Bureau. Press Circulations Analysed 1928

Institute of Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising. An Analysis of Press Circulations 1934

Institute of Incorporated Practitioners in Advertising. Survey of Press Readership 3vols 1939



16. London Press Exchange. Statistical Department. Report on Investigated Press Circulations. (RepforDs) June 1932.
17. Lintas. File Report No. 387. Report on Fieldwork and Training in Darlington. Jan 20- Jan 28., 1938.
18. Lintas. File Report no. 296. Report on Experimental Survey inn Barnsley and Harrogate. 6Sept -5 Nov, 1937.
19. viz. eg. Cecil Chisholm (Ed.) Marketing Survey of the United Kingdom. London Business Publications Ltd. 1936, 37 etc.,
20. Lintas. File Report no, 296. op cit.
21. Abrams. op. cit. pp 63-80  
Graves + Hodge. op, cit. pp396-397.
22. Stevenson op. cit. p 55. It would be useful to look in more detail at Mass-Observation in relationship to academic anthropology and sociology in the 1930's. Certainly, Harrisson and Madge saw themselves as counteracting the dry, detached approach of academic sociologists. In the Introductory Pamphlet they wrote that current sociology was inadequate and that recent social surveys of London (H.L.Smith) and Merseyside (D.C.Jones) had not "tackled the ordinary behaviour, supersitions and ideas of those surveyed". The best effort in that direction had been American, the Lynds' Middletown. Introductory Pamphlet op, cit. p.36. Looking back, Madge has described British sociology at that time as 'bookish, timid, unproductive.' The best work came from fellow independents, for example, Michael Young. Charles Madge. Postscript. Britain Revisited. Gollancz. 1961. p.278.
23. Abrams op. cit. p.84-86.
24. This paragraph is based on Chapters of Tom Harrisson. Living thru the Blitz. Collins. London 1970. Harrisson saw the strategy of saturation bombing as yet one more example of the gulf of understanding between rulers and ruled. The strategists distrusted and despised the matter, believing that they would crack up under pressure. Britain defensive preparations were also based on a contempt for the masses, on the firm belief that ordinary people would panic under aerial assault.
25. Quoted idem p.22.
26. George Orwell. My Country Right or Left. Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters. Vol 2 p590.
27. Quoted Graves and Hodge.
28. Samuel Hynes. The Auden Generation. The Bodley Head. London. 1976.p.264. or as Graves and Hodge put it: "Like everyone else in the last two peace years, the poets in general were in a state of expectant, fearful, inactive confusion." Graves and Hodge op. cit. p.430.
29. Julian Symons. The Thirties. A Dream Resolved. The Cresset Press. London 1960.

30. Julian Trevelyan. Indigo Days. London 1957. p102
31. The Nicest People in England have always been the least  
Apt to solidarity or alignment  
But all of them must now align 'against the beast  
That prowls at every door and barks in every headline  
Louis Macnece. Autumn Journal.
32. Branson and Heineman. Britain in the 1930's
33. Claud Cockburn. I Claud.  
Page et al. Philby. The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation  
Symons. op cit. pp 116 ff.
34. This footnote is redundant and has been omitted.
35. Idem. 413
36. The objects of the LBC and the CP were identical, a Popular  
Front at home, and a Peace Front abroad. As Pimlott has put  
it, "Until the end of 1938, if not later, the Club pursued  
Communist aims with a diligence which made the absence of  
formal controls unimportant." (Pimlott op,cit. p.158.) In  
the first twelve months of the Club's existence, 15 out of the  
27 books published were written by Communist Party members;  
Gollancz admitted that the publication of books by non-Communists  
was largely a tactical move to attract the uncommitted to the  
Club. Through the LBC, the CP gained, at no cost to them-  
selves, a respectable and highly organised vehicle for  
propaganda and recruiting. The activities of the LBC  
and the emphasis placed by both the LBC and the CP itself  
on foreign affairs and the threat of fascism in the late  
1930's, help to account for the rapid rise in CP membership  
in the London suburbs during this period, so that by 1939  
40% of CP members lived in the London area compared with  
14.6% in 1926. (see Kenneth Newton. The Sociology of  
British Communism. Allen Lane. London. 1969. Ch.6  
Communism and the Middle Class and Appendix 5 published  
District Membership Figures.)
37. Left News. (LN). Oct.38.p995
38. LN. Sept 37. p495
39. LBCN. May 36. p.2. This message was constantly hammered  
home in Left News. John Lewis, the local groups' organiser,  
wrote in January, 1937: "The main work of the Club must  
always be enlightenment and education... The point is that  
right political and other forms of action are impossible  
without fuller, clearer and more correct understanding of  
the situation." LN. Jan.37. p.193
40. LN. Oct.38. p.998
41. According to John Lewis, in his History of the LBC, such  
correspondence was particularly important, both for the  
Club organisers and for the members, who wrote hundreds of

letters a week to Henrietta Street, asking advice on such issues as pacifism, the Labour Party and the Popular Front, and occasionally offering criticisms. (John Lewis. The Left Book Club: An Historical Record. Gollancz. 1970.) Mass-Observers, too, conducted much personal correspondence with headquarters at Blackheath, over and above the commissioned reports which they sent in once a month. Many Observers were anxious to be reassured that their contributions were of some value. Some criticised M-O publications. Others offered suggestions for new topics for research. One woman Observer wrote, for example: "I think one of the chief causes of the hitch in Civilisation is the backwardness of women. Actually, very noticeable progress has been made in the last 25 years, but it is not generally realised, especially among women, that the progress could have been further and faster and that fascism would put a stop to what little progress has been made. So I think a book (on the lines of May 12th) on Lives Women Lead would be good work." (Mass-Observation Archive. Day Surveys. 171. 1937). However, the tone of most of the correspondence between Observers and Blackheath, and, one suspects, of the correspondence between LBC members and Henrietta Street, was very much that of a diffident student asking questions of an eminent professor. That most Mass-Observers and LBC members accepted their position as the taught has wider implications, too complex to go into here, with regard to the acceptance of authority in culture and education before the Second World War.

42. LN. April. 38. p.770-1.

43. For example, one Observer wrote: "I joined M-O because I liked the democratic smack of its name, because I thought I saw in it the makings of a new sociology, because I know it will be an even better guide than current newspapers for social historians of the future, and because I wanted to help in this necessary work." (Day Surveys. Men. Dec.37. 327). Another explained: "I think it (M-O) is a pacifist organisation. By showing that the little man likes his pipe and his mantlepiece and his Sunday dinner, you are doing a positive work for peace. Isn't it better to say to a child 'Do this' than to say 'What are you doing? Then don't? By the same token it is better to show that the little man likes his house rather than blare that he doesn't want war." (Letter to M-O. 9.11.37. Day Survey Writer. Men. 470). Another joined M-O "because it might be able to do something to postpone the approaching catastrophe". (Day Surveys. Women Dec 37. 100). One lonely woman wrote: "I hope to gain mental tranquility from Mass-Observation. I am unhappy, and hope, from the observation of others, to realise that most people have as many crosses to bear as I have, and yet get over it." (Day Surveys. Women. Dec. 37.11.).

44. There were more mundane, but nonetheless important reasons why the LBC was largely a middle class organisation. The price of each compulsory monthly 'Choice' was 2/6 which, although much cheaper than the average publicly available hard-back, was still beyond the financial resources of many working class people. Further, there were, by 1938, 6 tempting additional

choices every month. As one Mass-Observor, a clerk, reported, his LBC bill came to "about 8/- per month, but I feel uneasy about this." (Reading Survey. 1937. Day Survey Writer. Men. 490). Gollancz promised that if membership increased sufficiently the prices of books would be reduced "so as to bring them within the financial resources of the million." (LBCN. May 1936. p.2.). In August, 1937, because "it was apparent that the Club had not penetrated deeply enough into the organised working class" (Lewis. op. cit. p.81.), an 'Associate Membership' scheme was introduced, by which, for 6d. a month, the member received a special, simple Educational Choice, but not the main monthly Choice and not the Left News. This scheme was not a success.

45. LN. Feb.37. p220. The few available figures suggest that the groups were predominantly lower middle class in social composition. For example, the Essex Group consisted of several clerks, a physicist, a school teacher, a bank clerk, a draughtsman, a dental mechanic, a printer and a road mender. (LN. Sept. 37. p370). In the largely working class district of Hackney in East London, the LBC group was made up of 6 factory workers, 1 railway guard, 5 office workers, 1 chemist and several housewives. (Lewis. op. cit. p.28).

46. LN. June 37. p389..

47. Bearing this in mind, there is a certain irony in Laski's review of Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier, the Club Choice for March, 1937. According to Laski, Orwell's socialism was vague and abstract and ignored the problems of the State, class antagonisms and 'the historic movement of the economic process'. Orwell "might persuade people in Streatham and Chichester and Cheltenham that socialists are 'really quite nice people'... but... would not bring socialism nearer. I am not sure that Mr. Orwell's kind of socialist would be prepared to pay the price of socialism. And I think he would not pay it because the appeal to be a socialist to which he responded did not in fact make him a socialist at all ... At bottom, in fact, it is an emotional plea for socialism addressed to comfortable people. When the facts make them feel uncomfortable, charity seems to act as sufficient anodyne. (LN. March 37. p276). For Orwell's remarks on the 'West Bletchley revolutionaries' of the Left Book Club, see Coming Up For Air, Gollancz 1939. Penguin Edition pp143-160.

48. Activities at the Summer Schools included dancing, drama, tennis, rambles, discussions and lectures. At the 1937 Summer School, Tom Harrison gave a talk on Mass-Observation. An analysis was made of the social composition of one week's students at the 1938 Summer School. The occupations of 81 of the 130 students were recorded; these were: 18 'industrial' workers, 11 clerks, 25 teachers, 15 professional workers and 12 students. (LN. Sept. 38. p986.) For details of LBC holidays for 1938 see LN. Mar.38. p747.

49. LN. Aug.45. p3252.

50. LN. Feb.39. p1154.



51. LN. Mar.39. p1189.
52. LN. May 39. pp.1283, 1289.
53. LN. July 39. p1352.
54. Strachey argued that Czechoslovakia, which had been merely 'weakly liberal', and Austria and Poland, which had both been 'pro-fascist', were not worth fighting for. (LN. Dec. 39. p141.). In a Daily Worker article reprinted in Left News, Gollancz himself was labelled 'a fascist'. (LN. Dec.40). Strachey eventually rejected opposition to the War in May, 1940.
55. Stuart Samuels. The Left Book Club. Journal of Contemporary History. Vol 12. No2. p81.
56. LN. April 41. p1678.
57. As one Mass-Observer put it in a letter to Blackheath: "What I want to know about M-O is how it is financed... I have told Charles Madge a good deal about myself but I don't know the first thing about him." (Day Survey Writer, Men, 470. Letter to M-O. 9.11.37). Another Mass-Observer, a bank clerk and a member of the LBC, described a lunch-time conversation. A note of anti-semitism might be detected in his colleague's criticism of the LBC: "After I had finished eating, I remarked that the Left Book Club had now obtained 50,000 members. My friend smiled sceptically and remarked that Mr. Gollancz would be able to buy a nice new Rolls Royce this month. This, of course, led to a heated discussion." The Observer pointed out the advantages of "cheap publications of authoritative books on political and social questions. My friend could not get rid of the idea of Mr. Gollancz, wearing an expensive-looking coat with fur collar, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as he raked in the half-crowns from the 'poor mugs who came under his spell.'" (Day Surveys. Men. Nov.37. 291.).
58. Quoted Samuel. op. cit. p78.
59. Graves and Hodge op. cit. p426.
60. Idem p421.
61. Idem p422, 423. See Britain by Mass-Observation. Penguin Special 1939. Ch.1. Astrology and the British Ass.
62. See Graves and Hodge pp419, 420. Branson and Heinemann pp278, 279.
63. Addison op. cit. p128.
64. Idem pp147, 148.
65. This section on the documentary movement is based on:  
 Stuart Hall. The Social Eye of Picture Post. Working Paper in Cultural Studies 2.  
 David Mellar. Humphrey Spender and the visual imagination of Mass-Observation. A Descriptive Chronology. in Humphrey Spender Worktown

- 65.(Contd.) Photographs of Bolton and Blackpool taken for Mass-Observation. A Catalogue. 1977.
66. Interview with Humphrey Spender. 27.7.77. by Derek Smith. In Worktown. Photographs of Bolton and Blackpool. Taken for Mass-Observation op. cit.
67. Hall op. cit. p83.
68. Peter Keating. Into Unknown England. p13.
69. Quoted Mellor. op. cit.
70. Keating op. cit. p13.
71. Tom Harrisson, Introduction to Bob Willcock. Polls Apart. Unpublished survey of M-O. 1947. p2.
72. Keating op. cit. p16. ff.
73. Tom Harrisson quoted in Timothy Green. op. cit. p162.
74. Tom Harrisson. The World Within. op. cit. p159. Priestley, in English Journey, had written of Bolton: 'The ugliness is so complete that it is almost exhilarating. It challenged you to live there.' quoted Mellor op. cit.
75. Introductory Pamphlet. Mass-Observation. op. cit. pp16-17.
76. Idem p20.
77. Idem p31.
78. Idem p30.
79. Idem pp35,43.
80. Idem p40.
81. Idem p46.
82. See esp. Hynes op. cit. pp280-288, Symons op. cit. pp102-103; Harrisson letter to Charles Madge 18.1.40. esp. pp4-5.
83. Introductory Pamphlet op. cit. p47-48.
84. It may be that I should have paid more attention to the importance of surrealism in the early years of M-O. I would welcome any comments any reader might make on the British surrealist movement and on its relevance to Mass-Observation.
85. Kathleen Raine. The Land Unknown. Hamish Hamilton. London 1975. p81.
86. May 12th. Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. Faber and Faber. 1937.

87. For a full treatment of May 12th see David Chaney: A Public Imagery: Mass-Observation and the Coronation of 1937. Paper to Conference of the British Sociological Association, April 1978.
88. Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson. Mass-Observation. First Year's Work. Lindsay Drummond. London 1938. pp48-63.
89. Quoted Bob Willcock. Polls Apart. op. cit. Ch11.
90. Night and Day 14.10.37. First Year's Work. op. cit. p60.
91. Idem p48.
92. Quoted idem p59. Spike Hughes in Daily Herald 11.12.37.
93. Quoted idem p58. Evening News 26.6.37.
94. Idem p63.
95. Polls Apart. op. cit. Ch 11.
96. Hynes op. cit. p284.
97. Idem p286.
98. Introductory Pamphlet op. cit. p?
99. HNew Statesman and Nation 30.1.37.
100. Tom Harrisson Preface to New Edition of The Pub and the People. Seven Dials Press. 1970. p6.
101. Britain Revisited. op. cit.
102. Mellor op. cit.
103. Trevelyan op. cit. p97. For the Worktown project Tom Harrisson solicited gifts from Lord Simon of Wythenshawe and Sir Thomas Barlow. The advances made by Victor Gollancz on books which, in the main, were never to appear, were extremely generous.
104. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge. 18.1.40. p18.
105. viz. Trevelyan op. cit. and Humphrey Spender Catalogue Chronology (Mellor) op. cit.
106. Quoted Mellor op. cit.
107. Spender interview with Derek Smith op. cit.
108. 95 Idem
109. 96 Trevelyan op. cit, p85.
110. Spender interview op. cit.
111. Britain Revisited. Tom Harrisson et al. Gollancz 1961. p26. also The Pub and the People. John Sommerfield. Seven Dials Press 1970. Preface by Tom Harrisson p6.

112. Spender interview op cit. Woodrow Wyatt has recalled:  
"My main job was to keep the gramophone wound up and playing George Formby records to make a suitable Lancashire background." The Times. 30.1.76.
113. For a lively description of M-O's Holiday Town activities see Trevelyan op cit. pp96-99.
114. The thrice told joke being: "I wish you were with Carl Rosa" "Do you?" "Yes. He's dead and buried." First Year's Work op cit. p46.
115. John Sommerfield and Mass Observation. The Pub and the People. Gollancz. London 1943. See George Orwell's thoroughly appreciative review of this book for The Listener, reprinted CEJL Vol III pp61-2. Of one piece reported speech Orwell wrote: "This little piece of prose, which impresses itself upon the memory like a poem, would in itself be a sufficient justification for beer, if indeed it needed justifying."
116. Hynes op cit. p282.
117. The following account of the M-O diaries is based on a reading of over 200 diaries and life histories.
118. M-O diarist no. 490.
119. M-O diarist no. W152.
120. Calder op cit. esp pp 631-5. Calder writes: "The typical Common Wealth member, it might be said, was a comfortably off schoolteacher living in one of the pleasanter suburbs of Liverpool, who had never been active in politics before, and quite likely would never be active in them again." p634
121. Tom Harrison Report on the M-O Archive. 1970. Unpublished.
122. Prospectus to Vol 1 of Robert Owen's Journal 'The Crisis' Quoted in 'Britain by Mass-Observation'. p29
123. Graves and Hodge op cit. p444
124. Britain by Mass-Observation. Penguin Special 1939.
125. Idem pp7,8,9.
126. Hall op cit. p100
127. Britain op cit. pp27,28.
128. Idem p36. Daily Mail 19.9.38.
129. Idem p39. Daily Mirror. 23.9.38.
130. Idem p50.
131. Idem p56.



132. Idem p57
133. Graves and Hodge op cit. p439.
134. Britain op cit pp 77,78.
135. Idem 982. Sunday Chronicle 28.9.38.
136. Idem p85.
137. Idem p82. Sunday Express 28.9.38.
138. Idem p88.
139. Idem p93.
140. Idem p86. The Left Book Club distributed 2½ million leaflets on the 'Hitler Menace'.
141. Idem p95.
142. Idem pp99,100.
143. Idem p103.
144. Graves and Hodge op cit. p440  
Britain op cit. p105.
145. Britain p107.  
Roger Eatwell. Munich, Public opinion and the Popular Front. Journal of Contemporary History. Vol 6 No4.1971.pp122,123.
146. Britain op cit p105.
147. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge. 15.1.40. p17.
148. The by-elections were Dartford, where Labour took the seat from the Tories, Bridgwater, an Independent gain from Conservative, Oxford, Donsaster, West Lewisham, Walsall and Fylde. Labour's increased share of the vote cannot be explained simply in terms of the swing of the pendulum. Labour's vote at Parliamentary by-elections had been increasing very slowly, if at all, up to 1938. In the local elections of May 1938 there had been an overall swing against Labour. The swing against the National Government in these seven by-elections is attributable, largely, to reaction to the Munich crisis. The smallest swing against the Government was at Walsall, where foreign affairs played little part in a campaign dominated by local issues.
149. For accounts of the Oxford by-election see: Iain Maclean. Oxford and Bridgwater, in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (Eds.) By-Elections in British Politics. Macmillan. 1937. Also Eatwell. op cit. and especially Picture Post. 5.11.1938: Tom Harrisson. The Crisis By-Election.
150. For Bridgwater see Maclean, Eatwell and Pimlott op cit. and also Left News, December, 1938, which claimed, with some

150. degree of justification, that the Left Book Club had  
cont. been ultimately more responsible than any other factor  
for striking this decisive blow against the National  
Government'. (p1078)
151. Willcock. Polls Apart. op cit. Ch.XII,XIII.
152. For a most interesting discussion of the obituaries of  
the decade, see Hynes op cit. pp382-393.
153. Out of the People WPCS 9 op cit. pp34,35.
154. Tom Harrisson. World Within op cit. p.162
155. Idem p162
156. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge. 20.9.39.
157. Mass-Observation. War Begins at Home. Chatto and Windus. 1940
158. Idem pp13,14
159. Idem pp9,11
160. Quoted Addison op cit. p.165
161. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge op cit. 20.9.39.
162. Bob Willcock. Mass-Observation. American Journal of  
Sociology. Vol XLVIII No. 4. January 1943
163. This paragraph is based on Tom Harrisson. Report on the  
M-O Archive. Unpublished.
164. Nicolson was National Labour M.P. for West Leicester. He  
put out a widely publicised statement describing the behaviour  
in the House of Commons on the Wednesday of the announcement  
of Chamberlain's third visit to Germany as "one of the most  
lamentable exhibitions of mass hysteria that great institution  
has every witnessed.". The Daily Express carried a leader,  
criticising Nicolson, entitled 'Let him Resign'. Britain op  
cit. p104.
165. Letter from Charles Madge to Tom Harrisson. 21.1.40.
166. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge. 18.1.40.p24.
167. Letter from Tom Harrisson to Charles Madge. 25.1.40. p.22
168. Charles Madge. The Birth of Mass-Observation. TLS.5.11.1976  
pp 1394,5
169. Willcock. American Journal of Sociology. 1943 op cit. p450
170. The fullest account of M-O's Blitz activities is Tom Harrisson's  
Living Through the Blitz op cit., on which the following  
paragraph is based along with, Willcock, Polls Apart op cit.  
and Harrisson's Report on the M-O Archive, unpublished.  
At the same time as M-O began work on the Blitz for the MoI  
Bill Brandt was also signed up to photograph the social  
consequences of the Blitz in London. (Mellor op cit.)

171. Tom Harrisson, Report on the Mass-Observation Archive. No.5.1970 Unpublished. Directives continued to be sent out until well into the 1950's. Diaries were also received until then and some as late as 1965, although M-O, by that time Mass-Observation Ltd. a commercial research and social survey organisation, for reasons we shall see below, made little use of them. Day Surveys were temporarily revived in 1977 by Philip Ziegler and the Mass-Observation Archive in connection with a study of the Silver Jubilee. The results of this modern mass-observation can be found in Philip Ziegler, Crown and People, Collin 1978. It is also interesting to note that when M-O appealed again for volunteers in 1947, a very large proportion of the replies was from middle class people. But over ten years the internal composition of the middle class group had changed. There was an increase in the proportion of technical and scientific workers. Civil servants and clerks remained well represented.
172. It might be argued that the focal point of the crisis was within the ruling class.
173. Mass-Observation. People in Production. Advertising Service Guild, 1942, and Penguin Special 1942.
174. Idem p403
175. Idem p405
176. Idem pp407, 404
177. Idem p406. See also Calder p334
178. Tom Harrisson. Report on the M-O Archive. 1970 Unpublished.
179. In June 1942, immediately following the capture of Tobruk and the loss of 33,000 British soldiers as prisoners, Tom Driberg transformed a Conservative majority of 8,000 at Maldon, Essex into an Independent majority of 6,000 Calder. op cit. p345
180. George Orwell CEJL. Vol 2. p317
181. Tom Harrisson Who'll Win? Political Quarterly Vol XV. Jan 1944
182. See Calder and Addison. Calder: Never Again? Ch.9. December 1942 to August 1945. Addison: Ch.18. Conservatism in Eclipse.
183. Willcock. Polls Apart. op cit. Ch.XX
184. Idem Ch XX
185. Tom Harrisson World Within. op cit. p,164
186. Out of the People. WPCS 9 op cit. p . There is a danger of circularity here. The argument that a 'new centre' in British politics was born in the 1930's and matured during the Second World War, drawing in radical, critical, unalligned

186. politicians and commentators, has been best stated by  
(cont) Calder and Addison (op cit.) The work of the Cultural  
History Group of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural  
Studies, published as Out of the People, the Politics  
of Containment, 1935-1945, in WPCS 9 (op cit.), was  
heavily dependent on Angus Calder's book, The People's  
War. Calder's thesis was confirmed by Addison's  
extensive research when The Road to 1945 appeared in 1975.  
Both Calder, and, to a lesser extent, Addison, made use of  
Mass-Observation's File Reports as a major source. M-O,  
as we have seen, was not so much an independent, analytic,  
scientific organisation, more a major articulator and, at  
times, originator, of this increasingly important  
structure of feeling. The argument, of course, stands,  
but evidence from other and diverse sources should be  
sought to rule out any vestige of circularity.
187. Hall op cit. p
188. Mass-Observation. Introductory Pamphlet. op cit. p8.
189. WPCS 9. op cit. p35.
190. Symons op cit. p103.
191. Lintas. File Reports 390A. Social attitudes to Margarine.  
An Enquiry by Mass-Observation. December 1938.
192. Abrams op cit. p
193. Idem p79.
194. Idem p111.
195. Idem p112. William Albright, writing primarily for an  
American readership in 1956, was much kinder to M-O.  
He wrote: "I cannot discern a statistically accurate  
representative sample of subjects in any of the M-O  
studies... But the publications of M-O are written  
with color, brilliance, cleverness and occasional wit.  
Nothing comparable, as interesting reading, is to be  
found in any of the reports of pollsters or attitude  
researchers in the U.S." William Albright. Modern Public  
Opinion. McGraw Hill 1956. p195.
196. Mass-Observation. Draft Publicity handout. Dated 30.1.47  
p3.
197. Idem p15.
198. Willcock. Polls Apart op cit.
199. Abrams op cit. p87.
200. The Pub and the People. New Preface by Tom Harrisson.  
op cit. pp9.10.
201. Tom Harrisson. Report on M-O Archive. 1970 Unpublished op cit.



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