

**"Britain and the World
at Autumn 2010"
Report of a Listening Post
held in London on 6th October**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following two interrelated themes:

1. Generational Issues

Hope is located in the next generation. There is splitting of left/right; old/young; and of optimistic/pessimistic. There is a dilemma facing the generations. Do I trust them? My sense of the future is that there is a generation gap, we are moving across generations.

What rules our precious resources, financial, environmental, children and generations? Politicians at 45 are over the hill. Is this a chance for reflection and a victory of youth or will Ken Clarke bring sanity to the discussion? Does it enable us to realise the big society which many of us would agree with?

Over the hill at 45, a sense of aging, what's going to happen when it becomes an ever more aged society? How do we choose the way we commit our economic resources? How do we maintain cohesion, will older people become a burden in a few years' time?

It's an interesting range of ages, people study long periods in Portugal, they enter work at 25 - 30; at 50 they are too old; they only work between 30 and 50. People have to contribute more for their old age

It's a go getter competitive race to go and get a piece of something. Another generation are not on same planet. There is talk of a progressive society, if we go back to 50s it would be OK. My generation are now in a different place.

Is it possible to cut the previous generation down to size rather than knock off his head. People link to Ken Clarke because of his knowledge of the past and his values.

The number of children per family is decreasing. What we felt when we had our first child was a lot of expectation in the family, children are precious. So in a way you balance the number of children and then expectations – it's a balance. Also stay at home mothers, losing benefits if at home.

Experience of being on tube with my pregnant daughter quite interesting whether people stand up or not. Something about you make a life style choice. It tends to be people who don't stand up.

Alongside that people feel offended and don't want to sit. Then they resent being turned down.

Portugal like all western countries is more concerned with the financial crisis, not the welfare state and unemployment. In a way I am most preoccupied with my small daughter 6-7 months old and how she is to get different skills to survive in a different society how to connect outside. Competition may not be the best word but there is worldwide competition for a job, security, cultural backing and importance. She needs to learn how to write English. What will be the working language? Change the strategy of the family.

My sense of the future is bad because my generation not able to sustain, no choice. Lot of emotion, everything is cheap and we can study we have a lot of choice but we get lost.

I have a question about if what we are trying to protect is the environment. For me it's more about the new generation than us. I don't know but if I asked my 7 year old daughter. She wants to travel She wants a Facebook account and we argue over it. She says my friends live elsewhere I want to contact them, how can I connect without Facebook? There is a generation gap. The internet gives a different perspective. However experience is very different if not on line it does not exist, it's a new conception of reality.

My 14 year old is often on Facebook, I try to protect, it can be a safe place when they know their way around but it can also be dangerous it's a question of trust. It's very different change.

Boredom is not something the new generation tolerate they even have DVD in car, all their time is filled.

2. *Lost in a tide of change – fear of the future*

Generation issues – fear of future. A sense of confusion and multiple change of being lost and not knowing what to expect. It's a matter of competition or interdependency. Politics is about the inevitable things. Hidden agendas, underlying, alluring, the concept of Big Society.

Succession, the difficulties of – do we have to cut off the head of demons? Why do we need demons? Reflection and action or space to reflect.

Caught up in a question of where is the energy dimension to do with the short term and long term taking us. It's a new age of responsibility We need to be looking to long term got to look at future. All that is occurring seems necessary but it is needing considerable

reflection. Reacting, timing, de-energising, looking under layers to find the space before you move on too quickly.

Split reaction looking under layers for energy, finding the energy, there is energy.

But not quick fix instant access a different situation.

What about big society, negative power, layer upon layer, depth rather than breadth of change. Feel in touch with these dynamics the technical escape route is usually a metaphor than an actual escape route.

Long live the king 'off with his head' (Brown) have to demonise someone in order to move on. Last lot have to be the head that is chopped.

On reflection, the comprehensive spending review and big society is something of a previous pointer, better community levels, bringing community back.

I retired from work a very long time ago now. I have a young family just finding schooling. I have been going to adult education classes. At present we are reading MacBeth the class is interesting because there are a lot of young people my children's age, they are all very confident and sure of themselves. But a moment recently was almost hysterical – they seemed to coalesce around the idea of the demonization of Gordon Brown – a decent human being. The reaction from teacher was also the same. No one else thought as me. I was out of their reality. I was quite ashamed of this. The whole group able to demonise I don't have much confidence. It is shifting from party allegiances to people.

In Sweden the right wing in parliament and in Germany, in fact most European countries have demonising tendencies, all these countries previously utopian all orderly now the right wing have got the wind behind them.

I'm very concerned about specific events. I have a feeling that a lot of people are waiting on the 20th and the comprehensive spending review. I work in the energy field which tends to be in the shade but we are building it up on this and that. Energy seems to be at the bottom of the pile. Today I tried to lower expectations and talked to my Chairman who had been to the Conservative conference and spoken to George Osborne, apparently the comprehensive spending review will kick off a load of reviews over a few months' time. Competition will be everywhere and people are nervous asking is this the final edition of Regan and Thatcher rule, or is it a blip and we will go back to the welfare state again. I feel a minnow in all this.

Negotiating human relationships. In pre-history people were able to look after things. Is that possible now? I am trusting that it will be possible.

Prehistorical society, at the macro and micro levels. We've been losing it and it's a question of how we bring it back into society caring and making sure children have opportunities.

Pre-historic Neil McGregor referred to native Indians and Britain re sale of land. Native Americans had no sense of land ownership – a way of thinking. Prehistory things were different.

Is the concern with pre historical talking to the ambivalence of loss of the welfare state; will people look after each other will they be abandoned.

The object becomes more than the person. We have to kick start ourselves.

I am anxious to speak for fear of pessimism. I am of South African background and was engaged in developments in SA. There was a time when ideas of big society were alive, something for the good of the whole SA population. They came to power and big society isn't taking place. A sense of greed and pursuit of wealth, there are those who drop out everything counts for nothing. Big society did not achieve. Something about the Big Society sounds fantastic but it doesn't fit with welfare society, the assumption people will be generous induces anxiety. Defence budget is talked about but how do you square all these things together, something is disturbing me.

As to the generation coming up I worry about the next 50 - 100 years. It could get pear shaped. If climate change kicks in it will be a very different society.

I have a sense of moving on, exhaling. My daughter has gone to do an MA, an older relative died at a ripe age, political parties have moved on. A sense that the future is catching up with me. It's what I've been waiting for, politically it's been a shift that I've been waiting for. It's arrived, personal part I'm now top of tree no one above me now.

I will shortly become a grandparent soon, a generational shift, what came to mind was listening to Woman's Hour about child benefits views of stay at home mothers – it was the only money of their own that they did not have to ask for – the same stuff as years ago. There is a vulnerability with pregnancy its unfamiliar. We live in interesting times and it may get more interesting. We are engaged in a fundamental ideological struggle. Impact of spending cuts not able to afford things. Do we face 5 years of dismantling the welfare state? A metaphor, give blood and you can expect to get it when you want it. They are abandoning people.

I wonder what generation I am in, this was triggered by a woman who sets questions. 20 students didn't know stuff that we'd expect them to know. My age group 40 - 50 whose expectations are grounded in different times are better off than other generations. There's a different group coming behind but this also affects us. The new generation knows different stuff. It's about letting go. I'm anxious about my own failure. We're all in this together in different ways What planet are you on, wake up and smell the coffee.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. The two interrelated hypotheses followed from a lively and stimulating discussion.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis:

The different generations are not talking to each other. In the past they did talk across generations. Why is there no cross generation talk?

Giving up and handing it over to the next generation.

If children can't rely on us what sort of parents are we. If we don't know, when parents/old are expected to know (the experience) we feel useless.

We seem to have a denial of mortality. There is a fear of not coping.

There is a fear across generations about how you distribute or redistribute resources.

There is personal and human deterioration, dehumanisation of humanity being older and worried young not able to look after our legacy. It is a poor legacy, great feeling of loss the world is a cold place can it be re generated?

Are they valued? Is a group legacy our generation, are the consequences coming home that's where the guilt comes in.

It is felt we identified the need to fight more and take space back, to think more and do more with resources. The younger generation need to grab the opportunity. If anyone offers a new job more money for my family I'll grab it.

Displace it onto new generation 'You are the answer'.

Putting the leadership in young people and denying our responsibility.

Politicians and financial sector employees are all young. We voted for youth.

Motivates death and not life but there are babies in No 10

I was talking with my nephew about going into engineering. At a Quaker meeting someone talked about having 'better lives', we held on to the notion of the first half of 20th century when we killed 55 million people. Is it so great after all? 'You're the ones (young generation) who are going to have to deal.'

Old generation and new generation, your future different than mine.

(Young person) We speak of the future – I think of now, give me some space, expectation you say, you need the resources, I now need them to have the possibility to do something. I have a need for advice. We get quite scared, too many things to do, please trust me. You want to give me the responsibility be careful. I'm going to do something please help me but let me do it.

You know more than me I need advice a relationship a dialogue. Old only speak to old. Huge anxiety around not knowing what we are expected to know therefore we displace it onto the young.

It's hard knowing how to live with anxiety.

Why we can admire young is to allow you to explore and not give you our views.

Allow you and support you to make decisions.

It reminds me of the adolescent role of mother – many holdings and letting goes.

The older generation are not able to supply containment because they feel impotent.

It's impossible to have cohesive perception of new generation. A reduction we can understand social networking.

Hypothesis:

Because of the breadth and depth of continuous and continuing change that has been the main feature of our environment for the past two decades or more, the older generation are faced with a seemingly impossible task of making sense of this new experience. At the same time, they see the younger generation who have been born into and grown with the changes as being confident and capable of living with these changes. Traditionally the older generation have been expected to be the font of knowledge and the ones who are able to provide direction and containment in society. The experience of not knowing is a highly anxiety provoking experience and a result is that they despair that they can provide the leadership role required and literally give up. This then leads to the older generation mobilising the younger generation to take the leadership role. A result is that the younger generation are asked to take authority without the essential resources of experience and advice that they require.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis:

It's the same old story, we had no utopia – it is all a fantasy that all was wonderful, because resources are now running out.

Power is more concentrated. The Coalition is a new political power but the old economic power still maintains.

So many choices – no choice. Where is containment if no choice? They don't need us.

Facebook is a metaphor for what's happening, all human life is there.

Is it the end of the paradigm?

Because of the current massive uncertainty and pending but unclear change we are impotent.

Reflection and acting, our legacy re previous actions so poor so we say leave it to next generation.

There is a problem about a good legacy, it's not happiness but conflicting experiences. When we were the earlier generation there were the same issues, when in 20s same. The last 10 years has appeared a window of plentitude.

A double shuffle, neo lib, lib dem, nothing has really changed it's still capitalism and greed, not a bigger picture. There is avoidance and turning a blind eye.

Because of results of grand scheme before we have a chance to clear off into the sunset its under our noses not going to do idealism any more we will get found out.

I have a pessimistic view, the internet is great, thousands of ideas all contradictory information, all different opinions, and it's in real time.

Here are unavoidable old power structures.

Splitting is essential, it helps us to unite when we can hate a common enemy. Where's the enemy, clock going rapidly, I am pessimistic but it's not our problems if the resources run out.

Some sacred cows are being slaughtered and leadership and succession is a big issue.

The old gits are out in force to destroy Milliband.

The style of leadership is important to Ed Milliband.

Succession in the family, same parents, same school, same university, same degree – two brothers split in generation.

Hypothesis:

Because of the experience of members of society that political and other social leaders have failed to meet their dependency needs over the past decade or more, they have become cynical and untrusting of almost anything that politicians do. At one level, members of society are aware of the complexity and serious nature of the financial crisis and have an expectation that tough economic decisions will need to be made. At another level the anxiety arising from the fear of the effects of such cuts causes splitting and concrete, inflexible thinking which leads to blame being attached to immigrants, welfare cheats, the rich and support for both extreme left and right wing policies and parties. A result is that members of society express this ambivalence by supporting cuts but not cuts that affect 'me'.

Convener: Lionel Stapley, Director of OPUS