

**"Britain and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a Listening Post
held in Brighton
on 14th January



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 as citizens, whether as worker, unemployed, or retired, as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. These themes emerged from the material from part one that connect to them.

(a) Both in Society and the family there is a breakdown of familiar values and authority that are double edged

The collapse of rigid views of class, gender, age stereotypes is something participants have worked for; on the other hand there is a sense of loss and confusion about the lack of norms, respect and parental/societal authority.

Twenty-first century parenting provokes anxieties - young people need non-judgemental facilitating and accepting (not imposition of middle-class values) - they also need to be engaged with, about values. So much can go wrong in not preparing them right for such a complex world. Failure to succeed (eg. Uni.) may open other possibilities. Possibility of despair that can lead to suicide. Fear in students of engaging with feelings and complexity of issues - they want to be told how to do it = psychological disengagement & distancing (Uni lecturer).

Sense of being past it over 40. Parent fearful of children living in "rough" area when children adapted to realities "I'm rough too." Sometimes TV or internet welcomes home latch key kids. In Spain more mothers home for children in a society with deeper geographical roots and kinship, providing a safety net.

Political double take "respect" agenda on one hand and punishing Asbos on other. What about confused majority "motoring in middle lane". Need to intervene in estates to do parenting classes to stop parents from cursing violently at children.

Less left wing inspired community politics. Painful withdrawal from issues when "electability" is more important than issues.

b) Ways of relating that are thought to be serious and of concern are seen by a new generation as irrelevant leading to more "frivolous" relating. There is a loss of social, moral and spiritual concern

People give the role of authority to solve problems to the state. Refusal by family with mother and teenagers to give seats on bus reserved for elderly and disabled even when confronted. Consequent fear of violent attack for having made confrontation. Shock that the mother supported her children's entitlement to seats.

How to hold conversations with strangers problematic. To appreciate their dress style openly is interpreted as intrusive. Some second chance available eg. Foyer for homeless youngsters who want to get a training and life skills. Social burdens of reduced economic and social opportunities at lower end of social scale.

c) Spirituality

How to deal with reference to it by others (eg. in last LP report). For some it is dated, irrational, meaningless and oppressive. For others the human spirit means much, human values, meeting in recognition with the otherness of others, transcendent experience. Is it a struggle to describe experience as spiritual, or is it alienating of deeply felt human values and beliefs? Is it transient and fleeting, or and lasting but mysterious? What is natural and what evil? Is violence and retaliation natural or evil as Condoleeza Rice perceived the terrorist bombers? Do such thoughts blow the mind when positions are taken? Is belief given more space than not knowing?

(d) The role of the media is confusing.

Design and presentation seem all and yet also there is a wide dispersal of information. Things may never be trusted for how they appear. Deep presentation of severe social ills co-exist with a cult of the individual, possessions and celebrity.

Lack of integrity in George Galloway's regression on Big Brother. Material pressures and money/possessions as success v. other values. "Debt & bankruptcy as an easy option". People mystified why a PhD student should take 2 yrs off earning to study mid-career. Senior teacher in private school shocked at vandalism and theft in "everything is replaceable" culture supported by parents.

(e) Withdrawal from risks of conflict in facing uncertainty of how to live in Britain today and how to express giving and taking.

See story of confrontation over reserved bus seats above. Role of charity collector for Kashmir earthquake whose colleagues found relating to Muslims who shared the collecting role and dealing with the aggression of the group of boys who tried to steal some money and ended up donating. Provocation when those who appear to "have" collected money from others. Role of representative of families in court more complex with private cases than social services cases - alternation of having/giving and entitlement to take are confused.

Education department toleration of people with paedophilic cautions and crimes reveals the unwillingness to take a stand and protect our society and our children.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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.

In formulating these hypotheses, it became clear from the themes above, that each could be seen as having a political, intra-psychic and spiritual element or aspect.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Confusion and loss accompany the experience of taking authority

Analysis:

"For evil to happen, good men must stay silent". Yet people represented confusion about where to find a model of authority that worked with non-judgementalism and the need/wish to facilitate competing with loss of social engagement and moral concern. This gap of confusion appears to let in "charismatic" sounding, media imaged, leadership with solutions.

Hypothesis:

We can easily internalise society's confusion about lack of representation in politics because we have a wish to avoid our capacity to resolve our own confusion. This can lead to forgetting or ridding ourselves of our own capacity for balanced views based on experience and mindfulness.

Analysis & Hypothesis 2.

Diversity and Chaos

Analysis:

On the one hand toleration of diversity was seen as good. On the other it bought also a diversity of values and unacceptable de-humanising behaviour. This was felt to lead to possible impotence in how to behave socially.

Hypothesis:

Toleration can be espoused as a dominant value because we wish to avoid taking authority and creating dependency upon our leadership. It can become "laissez-faire". Morality that is tolerant but firm draws on our capacity to see something of ourselves in the possibly violent ruthless narcissism of others.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3.

Choice

Analysis:

The (over-)valuing of choice creates over-stimulation and excitement at a range of internet and media generated possibilities producing the fantasy that anything is

possible (omnipotence). Limits to life chances can be denied. This made us wonder whether we are the co-creators or victims of perverse behaviour such as paedophilia and media voyeurism.

Hypothesis:

Because we yearn for the erotic possibilities of choice and control of our desires we easily deny the loss and disillusionment of limitations. This can lead to over stimulated society with a multiplicity of conflicting loyalties and roles. Because of over-stimulation through the media, we are deluded into believing that choice is limitless and that there are no bounds to the satisfaction of our desires. What was once in the private domain, such as repressed erotic fantasy and desire for death and suffering, are brought out into the public domain and made acceptable. In this way we lose sight of the boundaries between the real and the virtual.