

**"Canada and the World
at the Dawn of 2008"
Report of a Listening Post**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles, This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context. The discussion was wide ranging and a variety of areas were discussed and topics raised.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents a clustering of at least some of these themes.

1. *Not learning from the Past:* Ongoing military conflicts, regional wars, tribal battles and other intentional bloodshed suggest that we seem not to have learned to deal with differences in a more peaceful way. This might be tied to another concern about the difficulties that have impeded the spread of democracy and democratic institutions.
2. *The American Empire is About to Change.* The next president might be a black Obama or a woman Clinton. A politics of hope emerging from the USA and youth are becoming politically involved once more. Beware of the new youth who see themselves as 'activists' or 'artists' but are neither experienced, nor engaged nor productive and so are really pseudo-activists and pseudo-artists.
3. *Pluralism Abounds:* Morality is fragmented because the very same evolutionary factors in moral feelings can be expressed in dramatically different values adopted by different groups. Understanding this might help increase tolerance of difference.
4. *Policy and Research:* Our research based knowledge of childhood education has not been implemented in practice because of too few resources directed at the under privileged children who would most benefit. Policy progress is slow and steady and there have been enormous changes in our society since the 19th century. We are healthier, live longer and in less pain than people a hundred and fifty years ago. We are protected from the poor conditions in the rest of the world.
5. *New Ways of Thinking:* We wonder how post modern thinking has influenced our lives. 20 year olds are interacting with the internet in new ways that suggest changes in how they think about such things as personal identity, privacy and

engagement with the public sphere. This in turn suggests new forms of activism and fresh ways of dealing with the world around us.

6. *Privilege and Remembrance*: A story was told about a group of privileged women who were in a California spa during 9/11 and have returned to the spa every year on that day. Their recent worry was that the wildfires in California would put an end to their annual pilgrimage.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3 of the Listening Post we were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics that may be predominant. It is assumed in this part of our discussion that our collective ideas and ways of thinking determine how we perceive the world. We tried to develop hypotheses as to why these concerns might be occurring now and although there were few clear, easily identifiable hypotheses, there was, nonetheless, a lively and vigorous struggle to make sense of the Listening Post experience. This discussion has been distilled into the following interrelated hypotheses:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: There were several connected yet somewhat conflicting explanations about the concerns expressed in the room. Firstly it was said that these concerns emerged from information that came from the press and other media. When it was noted that there was almost no mention of the weakening economy, or the deteriorating environment and little talk about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, someone suggested that this reflected a desire in the group to not say the same old things, to be original.

Hypothesis: The lack of direct experience of economic and political hardship or of confrontation with extreme difference in views, suggested a worry in the room about the possibility that we ourselves are not real activists. Similarly a somewhat misplaced desire for originality suggested that we are worried about our own creativity.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: We are an especially privileged group of people because we are living in Canada away from the more troubled areas of the world. We have a desire to try to make things better both through our work and our other activities. It is difficult for us to see the consequence of our efforts, or indeed if what we do has any consequence. We are therefore not sure that we are making appropriate use of our special position of privilege.

Hypothesis: The story of the women who visited the same California spa on the anniversary of September 11th struck a special cord with some of us. This may relate to an unconscious fantasy that we too are like these women in some ways and are putting cucumber slices on our eyes in relation to our connection to the world's problems. We also hope that we can see things without blinders and with more compassion.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: It was pointed out that the general tone of the discussion was less full of doom and gloom than it was the year before. The hoped for positive changes after the next

presidential election in the United States, the increased political involvement of younger people in the Obama campaign, and the idea that young people were bringing new ideas and attitudes to public life as a result of the Internet lent an optimistic tone to the discussion. There was a similarly optimistic suggestion that some of our work was meaningful and could and did make things better, albeit at a relatively slow pace.

Hypothesis: It may be that our unconscious hope was that the attempts of the older generation to improve things for those less privileged would come to fruition in the future through the efforts of the next generation that would introduce fresh ways of thinking, new notions of identity and creative uses of new technology. A good time was had by most.

Convener: Sholom Glouberman