

**"Britain and the World
at the Dawn of 2008"
Report of a New Year's Listening Post**



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 experiences in their various social roles (work, unemployment, retirement, religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary, leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities). This part was largely concerned with people's everyday life experiences, as it related to the 'socio' or 'external lives' of the participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In this part, the aim was to collectively identify the major themes which had emerged from Part 1. A number of interrelated themes could be seen as follows:

1. Depression - oppression and impotence

There was a powerful feeling of impotent frustration at not being able to find a route to be able to mobilise change. Attempts to challenge or find a voice to express difference, dissatisfaction or difference fail and it is not clear whether this is as a result of being covertly silenced or inadequacy. There was a powerful sense of confusion and uncertainty at how to take up authority. This was characterised by a pre-occupation that rules are being set out of public view and that powerful agents are not playing by them. This provoked a preoccupation about fear and control and a question about whether apparently paranoid feelings are actually based in reality. Society does not have a model for this new system of being managed. Old models (like colonialism) come back into awareness as a reminder of the deficits and the challenges.

2. Dis-ease, illness and infection/silent invasion

There was discussion of widespread illness/infection - 'everyone is down with the flu'. This was also linked to the tension of immigration and migration and on another level to the sense that there is a creeping and unacknowledged infiltration of new economic forces (the influence of private equity on the global situation).

3. The malaise of economic dislocation

As well as the economic uncertainty in theme 2, the disparity between rich and poor was thought about and also the sense of being on an economic precipice with punitive consequences. Something of current experience was characterised as a societal preoccupation with 'the price of everything and the value of nothing'. Valuable assets (like the Henderson and access to Higher Education) are being systematically destroyed.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post, members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2 with a view to collectively identifying the underlying conscious and unconscious dynamics that might be predominant at the time, and developing hypothesis as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here, members were working more at identifying what was happening at the level of the 'internal' world. The collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. The themes that emerged were clear and interrelated, and a lively and passionate discussion took place in which members tried to make sense of the Listening Post experience.

Analysis:

There is a new social order that places the value of money above all else. Ownership is increasingly held in private not public hands. The opening of global boundaries gives an illusion of open access which belies the chaos and impotence that result from too much choice. Meaning which has historically often been expressed through religious belief and mutual concerns has been overtaken by money as God. The illusion of choice obscures value. Members of society do not have a framework to fight or challenge this new social order and are left feeling impotent. The feelings of paranoia and madness that people described experiencing were understood as arising from receiving projections from a mad system. It was acknowledged that this hypothesis (that the system is mad and projecting that into the good humanitarian socially minded citizen) was seductive and could contribute to a feeling of splitting that was evident.

The splitting was also thought about as the disparity between the excitement of celebrity and economic dominance and the misery of an inability to acknowledge (or mourn) the loss of humanitarianism and social care. For example, that week Gordon Brown had spent 1 hour with David Beckham and 5 minutes discussing the new 3 year deal in the public sector. It was felt that this led to a manic depressive state of mind in society. Access is being denied to places where understanding can take place (the Henderson, Higher Education). It was noted with interest that the Salvation Army's stand for temperance and moderation was needed to support a responsibility for recovery.

Hypothesis:

Because of greed and the dominance of global capital in a new social order it feels as if it is impossible to hold governments (and people's representatives) accountable leaving members of society unclear how to take up their authority and mobilise their capacity to engage.

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