

**"Germany and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 13th 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, 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 for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents a clustering of at least some of these themes.

Theme 1: News Management

The initial experience was the expression of annoyance about the role of the media, how little genuine information passes the format filters of news channels and hence the difficulty to inform oneself.

Theme 2: Helplessness

The group subsequently focussed on the pervasive feeling of being overtaxed by excessive demands, helplessness and sheer emotions and the loss of trust in the face of increasing complexity and diminishing transparency of technological development. The economic crisis has revealed that this very same complexity can be abused in the interest of power retention, control, deception and thus thwarting change in both economic and political areas. How are we to handle this complexity so that reliability, social conduct, basic ethical values are not lost? There was general consent that it is essential to encourage and maintain the faculty of personal judgement, to promote an asking attitude, to put up resistance and never lose touch with reality. Prerequisites are awareness of one's own emotions and development of empathy. In his personal sphere every individual must take this initiative in the hope wider consequences in his or her wider environment may follow.

Further topics were:

- how to deal with the economic crisis, whereby within the group the spectrum swung between poles: hope what a fresh start may bring and scepticism regarding long-term solutions since there appear to be neither adequate concepts nor identifiable

- leader-figures representing new approaches (c.f. Obama); there was widespread misgiving about the tendency to seek instant solutions and scapegoats to blame.
- public claims on the importance of the family, yet paralleled by an increasing rate of children living below the poverty line.
- the fact that wars occur in distant regions, whereas Europe has not had a war over the Russian-Ukraine gas problem; astonishment that fear of possible terrorists' acts plays little or no role. Some have discerned increasing friendliness in everyday discourse and wonder what this means: increase in social-mindedness?; flight instead of fight?

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.

Analysis and Hypothesis:

On the basis of experiencing increasing friendliness and the people on their best behaviour we asked what implicit motives might lie behind this behaviour. We assume that there is widespread fear of change in spite of preconscious awareness that conventional routes are past their prime. Change would imply acceptance of the totally new responsibility for one's own behaviour, farewell to the fascinating promise of omnipotence offered by technology and not to be content with external appearances. Fear of change also results from shame and other disagreeable emotions. We assume narcissistic structures in many who set the tone, who are no longer grounded and tantalized by greed.

It appears important to attain and retain the faculty of judgement, to work out and express one's own position, creating a balance between open-mindedness and acceptance of challenges on the one hand and shielding oneself from the overpowering in order to act pragmatically. There are positive examples like the increased resistance of professional groups, e.g. medical doctors who protest against unlimited availability demanded of them or the rising number of men who set new personal priorities in requesting workload reduction or leave of absence in order to assume parental responsibility: these are signals that sections of society desire to live by a different code of values. The rediscovery of Keynes' concepts is a further source of hope for the future.

Conveners: Barbara Schneider and Judy Ritter