

**"Britain and the World
the Spring of 2009"
Report of a Listening Post
held in Liverpool on 6th June**



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.

1. Price vs Value

Many people felt they worked under imposed pressure that was on top of the normal pressure from dealing with real problems. They felt that success has become defined by targets and bureaucratic demands. Everything must be achieved in short time spans – people must be moved through systems as quickly as possible. It felt as though their job was to meet targets, rather than deal with the problems people brought. The risk is that we lose what is really valuable in terms of human engagement and relationships. This led to a denial of the dreadfulness of some people's lives in the relentless drive to meet the targets.

2. Security of the past / insecurity of the future

The discussion acknowledged that the past was often filled with threats but it felt more secure in terms of a place in community/ society. The medieval period contained many horrors but provided a knowable system and overall narrative. Life for poor communities in Liverpool was tough but there was also a sense of solidarity and community. This has not completely gone (for example, a church in Toxteth is still valued and unvandalised) and people still offer one another support but this happens without the level of encouragement and investment that there used to be and is more fragile. We have watched the experience of collectivism smashed. Most of the group were middle-aged or retired and there was a feeling that we had been cocooned; we were borne after the war, were students when there were grants, graduated or left school when there were jobs and were receiving or looked forward to decent pensions. The next generation do not have these protections and also have to face global warming, the end of oil etc. We may be emerging from a state of denial about this and beginning to feel the anxiety. There were thoughts about us destroying the planet – but then recognising that the

human race may destroy itself but the planet would survive and adapt – this felt humbling.

3. Political disengagement - small is beautiful

There was a recognition of withdrawal from political engagement. Politicians have lost their authority – and seem unwilling to speak with a voice of authority. This means people are less willing to follow them – we are losing both leaders and followers. The media has taken on the role of the stocks in medieval times – providing public humiliation, but there were doubts that this is the best way of challenging politicians. There was a sense that political involvement or protest achieved little – it didn't prevent the Iraq war. This did not result in a complete sense of powerlessness though and the way forward seemed to be through a return to 'small is beautiful'. One example of this is transition towns and communities and larger movements can start from local initiatives (e.g. ending the use of plastic bags). We need to look at different systems. Young people are demonised but when you talk to them their desire to talk is huge. Where do we go to talk? There was a discussion of what citizenship meant and a view that we become citizens when we dissent.

4. Speed of technology

There was a strong feeling that the speed of information is unmanageable. It leaves no time to think or reflect and increasingly replaces human communication. We expect to get things quickly and instant satisfaction becomes the norm. The positive side is the increase in connectedness but the quality of this and what it is used for seem debased. Life is constantly speeding up and there is little time to think. There was a sense that we are living like there's no tomorrow and comparisons were made to the Titanic – a belief that the ship will never sink. It is as if this is not our problem and the consequences will be for our children and grandchildren to deal with.

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 an hypothesis as to why they might be occurring at that moment.

Analysis: We seem to be caught up in a cycle of perpetual motion. Within this, it becomes increasingly difficult to question the prevailing narrative which seems to be that growth is everything. There are examples of human vitality but they have to exist outside any system. We are leaving ourselves no time to think or have a collective conversation. This raises the question of what it is that can't be spoken about, which might be a growing recognition that we can't go on like this and we have to change the way we live.

Hypothesis: We are living in a state of manic activity, which is a defence against thinking, as this would mean a radical adjustment of the way we live. It also disconnects us from ourselves and each other which prevents us taking up our authority as citizens to act collectively.