

**"Britain and the World
in Summer of 2005"
Report of a Listening Post
held in Brighton
on 12th July**



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 these in work, 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.

(a) Excitement, fear and confusion at the seismic nature of events represented in the last week

Live 8, G8 summit, London winning Olympic bid for 2012, 7/7 bombing in London, all resulting in trauma, swings of emotion "nothing to hang on to".

This led to a sense of going beyond "saturation point" with systems breaking down (transport & phones), fragility, bereavement and death (giddy feelings). How to assess the risk? This also led to gaps opening up in possibly intensified and distorted reporting with misrepresentation and spin as politicians justify their actions through these events. Huge complexity and gap between message and what it might mean from different view points. Is there a threat to "our way of life", or are we safe and movingly privileged compared to others? A sense of identity being stolen (burgled homeowner couldn't find a policeman as all engaged with "security" issues) - a sense of no clear representation of our views in Live8/G8/Olympics/security response.

b) How to manage the different layering of roles

Each perspective evokes responses in professional, family, personal, work, community roles as well as unconscious roles in the way each apprehends news. This produces a sense of contradiction between what I am part of and what I am alone with, resulting in little connection to BIG Ideas. How do we deal with power and powerlessness including carrying a sense of responsibility.

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) How do we position ourselves in relation to difference and diversity

Horror at "others" who could do such violent things as terrorist suicide bombings v. wish for the "other" who fills out the part of ourselves we do not possess. If someone uses language differently from you or speaks another language, does it produce anger? Does sport create international bridge of bonhomie or provoke nationalist rivalry (surprise at reaction of triumph over Chirac and the French at Olympic bid result).

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-psychoic and spiritual element or aspect.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Privilege over an "other"

Analysis:

In reviewing responses to all the themes, aspects of attempted supremacy could be seen, whether in sporting or national triumph, the charity position of having something to give, spiritual dominance, material security searching for what has not been possessed, or even in the oscillation of mood between hope and despair as in despair we know how to be grateful for what we have. Also included were the satisfactions at the very attempt to find meaning through socio-psychological thinking at a Listening Post. The provocation of difference is great. A contrast was drawn between one Saudi newspaper suggesting that London was being punished for its successful multi-racial society (evidence of London-envy) and a US newspaper suggesting that "Londistan" was a permissive environment for terrorism to thrive and a danger to the western world.

Hypothesis:

Because of the opportunities and huge threats represented by the massive swings of mood and the re-cycled trauma evoked by last week's events (London bombings 7/7), there is a tendency in our beliefs, views and opinions to secure a privileged position over and against an "other", beside whom we feel superior. Such a "privileged" position is a way of defending against engaging with the fear/rage/horror/disgust of the whole picture that these events involve and of avoiding disturbing emotional contamination. In consequence, this leads to the projection of inferiority into others, both strangers and our leaders through a distortion of our experiences of power and powerlessness as we

are blinded to our ruthless attempt to fulfil our own desire for safety at all costs by maintaining a privileged position.

Analysis & Hypothesis 2.

Metabolising swings of inner experience

Analysis:

The external world alternates in our experience by making us feel good and safe one moment and then empty and fearful the next. We are terrorised and then phlegmatic (the British spirit). When our "cup is full" emotionally we need to project into enemies or leaders; when empty we yearn for an other who will give us mutual recognition that gives depth of meaning. Thus we can balk at the security forces/ leaders trying to deal with all of this. These situations have nothing to do with us/me, so I/ we can turn a blind eye and protect ourselves from the reality of the events. We can demolish any sense of relatedness.

Hypothesis:

Because of the stimulation of external events and the lack of the means of containing our reactions to them, we externalise our metabolising processes in seeking others to project on to in order to protect our equilibrium against what hurts or does not fit. This pushes them away as we dub them inferior aliens and pretend they are unrepresentative of ourselves. Alternatively, we draw them in, needing recognition and fulfilment of something in ourselves that we want or lack.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3.

Climate change and the risk to the world

Analysis:

Condoleeza Rice's perception of terrorist bombers as evil and not natural, as if not human, suggests a refusal to acknowledge the destructiveness in all of us. Our avoidance of the issue around the threats to our world environment through climate change and abuse of the planet were avoided until the hypothesis making stage of this Listening Post. The failure of response to the only minimal developments in addressing the issues in the agreement at the G8 summit revealed true denial of the key world political issue: survival of the planet in the face of our destruction of it.

Hypothesis:

Because we cannot bear to face the destructive potential in human beings, we ignore the key threat to mankind in the progressive and unchecked ecological damage to the planet and our survival as a species. We divert our feelings about this onto more minor issues of life and death in the immediate breaking news. This means that we cannot individually or collectively tolerate the loss, sacrifice and relinquishment involved in changes required to our standard of living which we try to protect. Underlying this process is the unconscious desire for the false mother of economic security against the denial that in clinging to her we are destroying and plundering the real mother earth upon whom we still depend. The dreadful consequences of this mean that we will destroy our own planet and species and other species with it.