

"Britain and the World at Autumn 2008"



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 this part participants collectively identified the major themes emerging from Part 1. On this occasion there were three themes, as follows.

1. Being responsible in the face of death

Members were particularly preoccupied and gave several examples of a widespread feeling of death and dealing with and/or the risk of dying both at individual and collective levels. The feeling of suffocation and being in the darkness was presented strongly.

Two members expressed their preoccupations in dealing with frail elderly members of their families and of the sense of fatigue associated to this. A sense made worst by the feeling of the government's policies that seem letting elderly people down. A member raises the theme of euthanasia and lack of clarity around it. Another associated the theme of euthanasia (that is the individual level) to the theme of genocide (that is collective or people level). Another member spoke of his concern about the biological end of species and how this brings home the risk our environment, our own survival, is. In this conversation the theme of dying seems to have a deep association with both the themes of responsibility and accountability.

Members made immediately the link with the current situation (credit crunch and market failures). How this situation is showing how fragile our societies are. A member expressed the ambivalence between knowing too much and not knowing enough and how. We are at the same time bombarded with news but this gives us the impression of being in control, while the reality seems to show that we 'took the eyes off the ball'.

We all are living above our resources; somebody did borrow more than can manage with no hope of repaying. Members pointed out to the ambivalence associated to choice: we have to face reality and take responsibility, but at the same time we feel lost.

2. The end of the good life

Members voiced that so far we enjoyed a very good life: we lived in the land, almost, of plenty and the credit crunch is showing us that that time is over now. We have been squandering resources and in doing so we have avoided thinking of the consequences of this behaviour. We can, all, individually adopt behaviours from which it is evident our effort to contribute to a compatible way of life, however collectively we show a sort of avoidance of the consequence of our way of life. We have reached the end of a productive cycle but we have not yet created a new way of growing. Young people are left to carry out our expectation of a new way of life that will replace the old one.

3. Control (or lack of)

Members expressed concerns about the lack of 'controllers' capable to manage the situation. As well as the frustration of those in 'controlling' roles to 'clean out the shit' that the credit crunch is bringing to the surface. It is a situation in which fear, greed and self-preservation is making 'all hell get loose'. As one member put it "can we wake up before destruction takes place".

Members also voiced the difficulty in identifying controllers who can manage the national situations when the credit crunch is showing us that the globalisation is a series of processes that operate across national boundaries. This makes impossible for national government to defend their own citizens and we are witnessing a lack of unite front at international level. This situation leaves us experiencing a sense of helplessness, detachment and dissociation.

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 dynamics both conscious and unconscious that might be predominant at the time, and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here, 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. On this occasion the members identified two interrelated hypotheses, as follows.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

The lack of authority produces a dissociation from the roles of followership

Analysis

The Convener suggested that the membership was expressing the societal presence of what could be described as a strong sort of contempt of people in authority (e.g. the Controllers) and invited the membership to explore this pre-occupation.

A member gave the example of a tiger with cubs: it is because she was able to provide a safe and security environment that the cubs were able to play and to grow, develop and learning. It seems that because people in authority seem not to be able to shield us from the uncertainties and calamities of the credit crunch, and other processes and events that are putting a risk our way of life, that we deny authority altogether. Because long established institutions have collapsed individuals seem to feel that they can only face

reality in groups (e.g. family) that are very close to them. The process of globalisation has made the sense of motherland no longer applicable.

In denying the expression of authority to others – including professionals – we dissociate ourselves from the roles of followership. It seems as if the dynamic leadership/followership associated with the ability to give and take authority is broken. Because we have enjoyed so much freedom we are less prepared to accept forceful direction as the credit crunch seems to require. With the credit crunch it seems that not only financial fortunes have been dissipated but also trust.

Although we recognise that we are within the process of the end of a way of life it seems we are more prepared to place the blame of the current situation outside our responsibility. It seems that this process is allowing us to manage the chaos and complexity in our individual lives.

Hypothesis

Because of the credit crunch the effects of globalisation and its impact on well established institutions is more visible than ever. There is no motherland and no national government that can protect us from the events. Members of society experience feelings of being left on their own without any protective environment, feeling helplessness and hopelessness. This produces a strong anger towards those who are in roles of authority for not catering for the dependency needs. This dynamic affects the ability to take up roles of followership making very difficult for anybody (individual or institution) to take up roles of authority that can help in the current situation. Because we feed ourselves in good time we seem not able to feed ourselves with a sustainable future. Without good enough parents (Institutions and people in authority) members of society seem to challenge their ability to make sense, although temporary and partial, of our societies and managing their complexity.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Lack of understanding produces an overwhelming sense of madness

Analysis

Members are aware of the lack of firm boundaries in our experience of society. The awareness of this lack is a source of paralysis that produced a sad feeling. Several members expressed the sense of difficulties in understanding what is new. One mentioned how is impossible to understand the financial products that have led to the collapse of the financial market. There are so many languages (both real and metaphorically) that it is impossible to be fluent in each of them. In this circumstances members pointed out that work and personal relations are the source of personal power.

Hypothesis

Because members of society are experiencing and are living in so many realities (both real and virtual) that give them contradictory signals they classify such realities as forceful, dangerous and scary. Because their good life is at risk it seems that they are paralysed and have lost the ability to analyse the societal processes as being at the same time bad and good: calling the end of a way of life but also announcing the potentiality of a future. This leaves members of society with the feeling of living in 'mad times'.

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