AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Israel and the World at the Dawn of 2013
Report of a Listening Post held in January

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles. This part of the evening was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context.

The meeting took place twelve days before Israel's general election on a day of heavy rains and snow. Only seven people attended and unsurprisingly there was a great deal of preoccupation with politics and who one could or should vote for. The low turnout continues the trend of the last several years for this event.

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 some of these themes.

Theme 1: Fear of survival and loss of way
This was not a fear of individual survival but rather survival of the whole. This also contained the fear of losing one's way which is more of an internal threat. Part of the expression of this was in seeing how minorities are not well represented in society and politics. The seven members tended in their views to be more left wing, centrist, liberal and secular and are increasingly feeling that they are becoming more of a minority within Israeli society. This feeling was strong enough to lead to questions of where Israelis would go if no longer comfortable living in their country. Fantasies and thoughts of expulsion or extrusion also came up. Possible countries of destination were the U.K., U.S.A. and the Seychelles Islands as the ultimate escapist fantasy.

Theme 2: Fragmentation, Division and Splitting in Society
Israeli society was felt to be undergoing increasing fragmentation. Thirty four political parties to choose from provide evidence for that. There was a great deal of preoccupation with different splits within the delicate balance in Israeli society. The following were identified: Jews versus non-Jews, Ashkenazi versus Sephardi Jews (western versus eastern origin), new immigrants versus those born in Israel, religious versus secular, right versus left and settlers versus non-settlers. In all this fragmentation there is a growing subjective feeling of not belonging and not having solidarity with present society. This feeling extends into how much Israel feels it belongs to the global world. It was noted that this theme of increasing sectorial thinking is present in the growth of nationalistic movements around the world with the Catalan and Basque movements in Spain being examples.

The term navel gazing also came up. Social media sites, predominantly Facebook, are affecting how many in society relate to relationships and relatedness. Associations were raised around 'me' ness, 'mean' ness, 'Facebook' less and 'Whatsapp' less. Along with this there is also another parallel process going on in society with increasing attention being paid to civic responsibilities and how to address solving issues of inequality and poverty.

There were also thoughts that increasing fragmentation is a defence to feelings of inferiority which manifest as excessive self-worth and self-righteousness.

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 1

Analysis: In the discussion there was a link made between fear of survival and loss of identity to increasing fragmentation and tribalism. This may explain Israeli society's tendency to be less preoccupied with what the world thinks of them. In some senses the pervasive fear of Israel's Arab neighbours is lessening as it migrates inwards into society itself. In the past the memory of the ovens of Auschwitz, which did not distinguish one Jew from another, helped form the melting pot of Jewish Israel. Today the trend may be rather that integration leads to loss of identity. This was felt not to be a solely Israeli phenomenon but can also be seen in increasing nationalistic and anti-globalization movements around the world. Locally further evidence of fragmentation could be found in the failure of the three centrist political parties to form a collaborative block.

On a worldwide level there is an increase in religious movements and growing fundamentalism. It was also noted that atheists are raising the volume of their discourse with believers.

Hypothesis: Faced with the fear of survival and loss of identity Israeli society is holding onto multiple identities and is increasingly fragmenting and entrenching itself into ever smaller groupings. The two alternative extremes of integration: a Jewish theocratic state versus a single secular state which includes the Palestinian diaspora was deemed too awful. There was a fear of civil war and expulsion or a swallowing up of the Jewish population of Israel.

The consequences of increasing fragmentation include a loss of ideology and a loss of feelings of belonging which extend to the outside world. More inward thinking gives rise to more nationalistic tendencies.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: It was noted that many countries around the world are increasingly preoccupied with their own financial and non-financial troubles. Examples include Italy, the U.S.A., Greece, Spain, France, Germany, and the U.K. There was a feeling that containment was a fantasy and was breaking down. The Euro zone is weakening and there is increasing forces to split into smaller country groupings whether in Spain or Scotland. These forces are also operating strongly within the former Soviet Union.

Hypothesis (less worked on): As a reaction to globalization there is increasing tribalism and fundamentalism. This leads to an increase of self-preoccupation both individually and nationally. This is also strengthening the growth of nationalistic and religious movements across the globe as they call for more separation and fragmentation. Calls of disbanding the Euro zone is but one example of this.

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