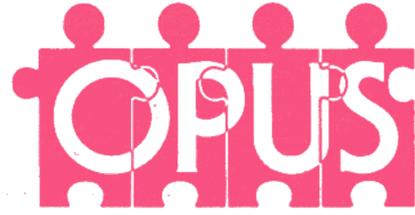


**"Canada and the World
at the Dawn of 2004"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 12th January



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, This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the social context of participants. The discussion was wide ranging and a variety of areas were discussed and topics raised. inequality.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. On this occasion, themes were difficult to name but can be drawn together as the following four interrelated statements:

(a) Science and technology are marching at a faster pace than our understanding of how to apply them. The pace of scientific innovation causes some improvements in people's lives but also results in dislocation and conflicts that we are often not able to resolve quickly.

(b) There are dramatically different perspectives on events. This makes it difficult to come to any agreement about what they mean or what to do about them. The identification of these differences emerged but was not resolved in the discussion. We wonder about what it means to be human, and what it is to be a victim of others. This was related to the different perspectives across social class and culture that emerged in the room.

A series of distinctions were made between some deep conflicts:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Palestinians and Israelis
- Rich and poor
- Environmental protection and economic progress
- Progress and No Change
- Risk and safety
- Personal, local and global

(c) A worry about how to mobilize social will. The sense that there was little that this or any groups could do to effect change. This was tied to a worry about the deep social

economic and developmental inequalities in the world and a fear that our western way of life is at risk

(d) The group was concerned at the limit of discussion to public rather than private concerns. This was quickly explained away by the fact that this was a first meeting and participants did not know each other well enough to express their more personal concerns.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

There were two major hypotheses, firstly that these concerns and differences were part of an emerging notion of democracy with its cradle in the Middle East conflict and secondly that they were part of the process of aging being undergone by the most vocal of our company. They were concerns of older people who are struggling to assimilate the change occurring in their lives and in the society around them.

Analysis: It was the view that society was faced with increased conflict and increased terrorism against civilians, much of it based or with its source in the Middle East. This period of intense conflict is coupled with a powerful sense of inequality in the world and feelings of guilt about our relative prosperity and level of security. This in turn brings a sense of foreboding about what might lie ahead - risks to our position and our way of life in the future. Moreover it is not clear what we can do about this.

Hypothesis: Just as the middle east was originally the crucible of western civilization several thousand years ago, it was proposed that the present conflicts in that region are once more the crucible for new notions of democracy that are tied to reductions in inequality and a broader notion of how to allow for differences before things can stabilize once more. This notion of democracy must be rooted in difference and conflict and multiple views rather than one based on a unified society with a common history and common values and a shared sense of identity. This relates to our difficulties with technological innovation as well, because it must take into account an adaptation to those innovations and a refusal to tolerate them at the same time. The very notion of progress is at risk, because reductions in inequalities in a newly defined democracy will inevitable result in loss. Much of our confusion is a result of this fear of loss.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

That these concerns were part of the process of aging being undergone by the most vocal of our company. They were concerns of older people who are struggling to assimilate the change occurring in their lives and in the society around them.

Analysis: The members reflected on the impossibility of understanding each other across the differences of culture and socio-economic inequality. They also felt a growing sense of impotence in the face of technological and social change change. Some of the international conflict and lack of understanding was reflected in a kind of generational opacity. Some members of the group felt that little had really changed but that old innovations had reappeared in new guises that had become hard to deal with. Others felt that there was nothing that they could do that would have any effect in the broader world. One went so far as to feel that the kind of discussion was so speculative and

removed from the reality of our day-to-day lives as to be something like talk about sports.

Hypothesis: There was a strong sense that this was an aging group of people faced with their own mortality. The group contained both older and younger people. The younger ones had very different views from most of the older people. For the older group the pleasure of hearing new ideas was connected to the pain of not being able to effect the kinds of change they had hoped for personally and politically. There was, if not despair, a recognition that some new ways of thinking were beyond its capacity and would come to fruition for later generations. At the same time there was some optimism that there were new ways of thinking that might bring us at least some way out of our present muddles.

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