

**"Germany and the World
at the Dawn of 2005"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 12th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

In the introductory phase the initial topic was the Tsunami in Asia and the subsequent overwhelming wave of German donations to charity. Ensuing topics developed, such as the parallels of poverty and misery associated with the Third World visible in Germany. It was summed up in contrasting positions: the apparently widening gap between rich and poor, excess work for some, scant opportunities for others; constriction through managerial bureaucracy, i.e. increasing paperwork fragmenting processes and procedure that had previously been constructive, life reduced to a checklist, loss of direction in the face of overwhelming mountains of firsthand data, processed data, e-mails, journalistic products.

In the following discussion the Tsunami seemed to become a symbol of the unavoidable flooding that has become an integral part of everyday life. Donations to charity that have broken all previous records may reveal the urgent need for exoneration by selling of indulgences, yet on the other hand the wish to perform actively in some capacity and not rely on governmental activity. In spite of the skepticism, there did appear to be a vague tide of optimism for no clear reason.

Other topics were the loss of values in the moral sense and more generally. Materialistic values are evident and leave the question where the pride in social achievements blossoming both here in the Seventies and in other European countries had disappeared to. Cases of social discrimination and impoverishment are taken for granted as inevitable compromises. Constantly, subtle and insidious changes are taking control of our lives.

In the search for hypotheses to work on these topics the following ideas were suggested:

- The Tsunami is an ideal all-embracing theme since it demonstrates the polarity of power and blameless powerlessness and simultaneously offers the possibility to offer constructive aid against one's personal feeling of futility and helplessness by a financial contribution. Like any and every all-embracing image it serves to distract us from disturbing facts.
- Another point was the question of constructive strategy in the face of the daily flooding. Flooding is a metaphor for the feeling of constriction in everyday life as expressed above. It, however, obliges us to take concrete action in contrast to the natural catastrophe. It would be desirable and essential for the readiness to participate in an active process of change to be rekindled like in the 60's and 70's.

- Instead of rushing headlong into the contemporary flooding of never-ending data and greater bureaucratic control and getting bogged down, there does appear to be a tendency that may explain the fleeting optimism hinted at above:
 - The stereotyped patterns of black and white polarity declaring strict contrasting categories are out of date and have lost their coherency for our sense of direction. The complexity of the world has increased. It is essential to recognize this fact instead of wasting energy by creating stricter control mechanisms. We will then be able to understand the necessity as human beings to develop adequate mechanisms and structures with both emotional and intellectual aspects in a perpetually changing situation.
 - Networking appears to offer stable but flexible structures granting means of orientation and organisation with the prospect of constructive interference. All in all it entails a farewell - departure - from an all-inclusive programme and towards a new willingness to envisage meaningful positions on the basis of irrevocable cornerstones e.g. the abolition of capital punishment in the European Union, the readiness to attempt progress step by step by virtue of constant processes of negotiation and consultation, if we are to permit new societal solutions and impulses. A game of football (soccer) may have originally developed from a struggle for power, yet it may serve as an example for the gradual development of rules that transforms and ritualizes a fight. Thus this act may relinquish its destructiveness.

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