"Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2006"
**Report of a Listening Post
held on 11th January**

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

I. Globalisation, Boundaries and Identity

At the beginning of 2006, Denmark is a country whose citizens are worried and confused. Globalisation either as a reality or an image of the future, leaves the citizens uncertain of where they belong. There is a longing for clear-cut values, a wish for community, but the question of which values and which communities to belong and adhere to, remains unclarified. Still people often react promptly when it comes to judging others morally. Some find that Denmark has already disappeared in the flow of globalisation, others that we are too provincial to take on the role of world citizens.

Adults are disturbed by the fact that when young people go out in the evenings, they constantly keep informed over the mobile phone where the most interesting party is, and so they let down those who throw less interesting parties. But the grown ups also let others down: There are divorces, change of friends, work, social background, and thereby also change of loyalty and solidarity. Males are no longer allowed to be males. But there is also a lurking anxiety that you will also be let down when you yourself are no longer interesting. On the other hand, there are also tendencies to open up to new contacts and relations, to an ever widening world.

Hypothesis

Globalisation - real or imagined - has the effect that citizens find it difficult to find where to invest their group solidarity. The changing boundaries lead to uncertainty as well as the feeling of letting something valuable down, but also to an eagerness to open up to new cooperating relations.

2. Polarisation - locally and globally

At the beginning of 2006 Denmark has a strong economy and financial welfare for most of the country's citizens. But among them, fear of polarisation is increasing. There is pervading anxiety that conflicts between immigrants and native born Danes will escalate, that the tension between the two will rise so that any act will be seen in terms of religious or political alliances.

Many Danes have profited from the increasing values of housing, and another worry is that this will lead to further inequality and polarisation between the well-to-do and the less fortunate citizens.

In the context of politics on a world scale, but also in everyday situations, it is hard to have confidence in the powerful agents' ability to handle issues like terrorism, the Middle East crisis and the Third World sensibly.

Fear of polarisation also seems to create paralysis. By taking a stand, one risks being positioned in one category or the other where one might become the target of hateful attacks and, moreover, not feel at home.

Hypothesis

As the split in the Danish welfare system between the well-to-do and those who are with limited access to the desired resources, there are feelings among *the haves* of guilt, shame, worry and a fear of the *have-nots'* angry attacks. The fear of polarisations and divisions as well as a violent escalation of the antagonistic relations between ethnic groups and between the privileged and the less privileged, makes it dangerous to take a stand, and so people say one thing and do something else. By being untrustworthy, the privileged part of the population contributes to the very polarisation they fear.

3. Culture in Decline

The bourgeois society in its late modern version is seen as a culture in decline. The laborious task of creating systems in the modern civilization to ensure the individual's civic rights, their freedom of speech and justice for all, seem to be eroding.

There is a general and deeply felt need of ideologies or common norms which can clearly point out what is right and wrong, present durable values that are to the benefit all groups in society. Without such norms, social concern is without fix points for where to start and for what can be usefully done.

USA - who is Denmark's ally in several respects which include the war in Iraq - seems to be on the way to bringing the western world back to the middle ages. Influential political-religious groupings fight to reintroduce Christian dogmatism based on the Story of the Creation in class rooms, and position Darwinism as heresy. At the same time the war on terror is used as an alibi for a permanent state of emergency where the basic human rights are dispensed with, i.e. the rights which the war on terror are meant to protect.

In many respects the Danish government lies in the in the wake of the Bush administration: extensive powers are given to the intelligence service. On one hand a feeling of a Danish national identity is cultivated in various cultural projects, and on the other the government does not find it necessary to speak up against the atrocities carried out in the camp of Guantanamo where an absurd form of intelligence service is carried out in third part countries in which intelligence is brought forward through the torture of citizens, randomly chosen.

Terror generates uncertainty, and this contributes to a general sinister atmosphere. The ground on which you were supposed to stand and defend yourself, seems to be rotting away. When a big and rich nation as USA does not have the courage and patience to stick to their agreed constitutional rights, and furthermore, is reluctant to follow UN dictates in stead of being in the front, defending peace and collaboration, it is as if one's parents abdicate.

Hypothesis
The societal superego is disintegrating - and needed.

The missing leaders in the outer world with both power and moral integrity, and at the same time, the missing inner structures with clear values impede social orientation and involvement. Psychodynamically the feeling is that parental figures are missing, i.e. figures representing social care and a sensible prioritising of undertakings in a long term perspective as well as ideas which they are involved in and ready to defend if attacked.

4. Ambivalence and guilt

There is a general and deeply felt need of ideologies or common norms which can clearly point out what is right and wrong, present durable values that to the benefit all groups in society. Without such norms, social concern is without fix points for where to start and for what can be usefully done.

Furthermore, taking a stand is hampered by people feeling guilty about having become well off because of their increasingly valuable houses, and therefore being without the moral right to defending the rights of the unprivileged. At the same time this confusion and paralysis also creates guilt. Is it really not possible to better when we are so educated and experienced? Is our guilt just a masquerading of a fear of loosing our privileges when building a world with more justice and equality?

There is a generally felt need to act politically, but also a feeling of lacking consistency in thinking, a point of departure which has not yet been tried and deserted. Thinking moves in unproductive and relativistic circles, in tennis ball movements where the feelings are muddled and frustrated tensions accumulate.

Hypothesis

Ambivalence, feelings of guilt, muddled sensations and frustrated energy could be interpreted as a potential for political action directed at defending civic rights for all, for a involvement in real exchange between ethnic groups, for working with what it means both to be a world citizen and a citizen in a nation and a local community.

Conveners: Zanne Lorenson, Steen Visholm, Se Lading, and Birgitte Bonnerup