

**"Canada and the World
at the Dawn of 2007"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 19th 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.

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 five interrelated statements:

(a) Birth and Death: The first member of the group to speak began by identifying his new grand child as a main focus of his recent attention. His talk was followed by a second who spoke of the impending death of a young man from a brain tumour. The issues of birth and death re-emerged throughout the evening.

(b) The dumbing down of language: A second theme elicited a long discussion about the various ways in which language is used and abused to oversimplify complex situations to the wider public, or to provide political spin, or to sell a variety of views or products. There was some debate as to who decreed that television material suit 10 year olds and why.

(c) Religion and other strong belief systems: The shift in belief systems to create more strong believers in everything from fundamentalist religions to militant ecosystem salvation was a third area of concern. This included the growing apocalyptic views about the impending death of the planet to the eruption of a nuclear holocaust sparked by religious fundamentalist terrorism.

(d) The sense that all efforts to make the world a better place after the fall of the Soviet Empire resulted in raised concerns about the failure of action to result in any improvements any where.

(e) Among the young people there was a concern about their own careers and their own futures. For them many of these larger concerns were less pressing than in the day to day concerns of meeting deadlines, completing pieces of work in progress and understanding how to negotiate a somewhat vulnerable career path in the arts.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics 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 internal world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. Again, there was a lack of clear, easily identifiable issues but there was, nonetheless, a lively and vigorous struggle to make sense of the Listening Post experience. This analysis has been distilled into the following two interrelated hypotheses:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

There were two major hypotheses, firstly that these concerns and differences emerged from a growing sense of helplessness that resulted from the recurrent failures of many collective efforts to improve the state of the world. A second was that the ideas in the room were the product of excessive reflection and too little action and even an unconscious desire to leave things as they are in order to retain a current level of security.

Analysis: It was the view that such issues as the rapid deterioration of the environment, the rise of international terrorism, the failure to eliminate poverty suggested that these critical situations have not been improved despite widespread popular efforts to do something about them. This remains coupled with a powerful sense of inequality and widespread poverty in the world, the growing global corporatism and feelings of guilt about our relative prosperity and level of security. This in turn is tied to a sense of foreboding about what must lie ahead. Apocalyptic views were expressed about the future state of the planet and in our own lives. Moreover it is not clear what we can do about these issues personally and politically.

Hypothesis: Some members of this group of people have begun to recognise their own mortality, their failure to effect change and are somewhat pessimistic about the future and have become depressed about the state of the world.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

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

Analysis: The members reflected on the possibility of actions that would be both personal and political and might very well lead to the resolution of many of these crises and conflicts. New efforts of a fresh kind were being brought to bear on many of them and there was some sense that they could still be resolved.

Hypothesis: An ageing society will settle on a notion of democracy that secures its own comfort as it ages. It recognises emerging deterioration, but hopes to avoid its personal consequences. The very notion of progress is at risk, because reductions in inequalities

in a newly defined democracy will inevitably result in loss. It may be that much of our confusion is a result of this fear of loss when in reality improvements are possible.

Convenor: Sholom Glouberman