

**"Germany and the World
at the Dawn of 2011"
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 participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes.

Starting point was a member's irritation at his Post Office branch: the P.O. claims to offer more and more with a new dazzling facade, yet the staff prove increasingly incompetent and he is no longer able to withdraw cash from machines outside office hours: appearances are deceptive.

One member spoke of the presence of police armed with machine guns in public areas allegedly to heighten safety from terrorist threats; she did not feel more secure, even wondered if the police were able to handle such weapons.

The group recounted other incidents where they experienced the loss of reliability and competence to respond adequately concluding that grounds of disturbance are ubiquitous, the most disturbing being that one feels so little disturbed.

The following were named:

- the complexity of the globalised world and technological changes
- loss of diversity, of familiar structures (e.g. breaks, work-free Sundays), demand for constant unlimited availability (mobile phones)
- contracts are frequently not honoured (poor payment practice)
- irritating tendency to consider the bank crisis as a thing of the past ('we've sailed through that')

- the so-called economisation of the world (e.g. in the health field), whereby only business management and cost factoring in the interest of a few individuals and global enterprises rule decision processes without consideration of social equilibrium (social costs) thus concealing long-term societal consequences
- increasing control potential via electronic technology (nothing disappears in the Internet) and political measures (e.g. anti-terrorist measures) and the difficulty of obtaining reliable background information
- tendency to blame others, e.g. specific ethnic groups, external enemies, politicians, even ourselves when resorting to do-it-yourself, when something isn't working ('but you paid to have that done')
- impression that people are prepared to get involved in societal protest wherever aims are limited and locally tangible
- significance of the private sphere (desire to feel at home), job and neighbourhood. Genuine options materialise on home territory. 'The private is political'. The private is not per se a retreat, but can mean re-call to past values. It enables the acceptance of responsibility for a certain area, but not in entirety, to attempt to shape, make a first step, since it is not possible to foresee if something is right or wrong. One is aware that linear concepts of progress are unfeasible and mere growth does not correlate with progress.

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.

Hypothesis

It is unavoidable that irritation and a swamping sensation caused by the complexity and speed of changes call for defence mechanisms in order to keep on functioning. The tendency to not feel unduly disturbed may on the one hand be understood as a fear dispersing strategy, repelling depression (e.g. the bank crisis: 'We've sailed through that'.) as expression of the injury to our self-overestimation, disappointment, defiance and distraction. On the other hand it may also serve to help catch our breath and win distance. Defence can thus be used both destructively e.g. to play the role of the eternal victim, find scapegoats and act out aggressions. And it can be constructive if leading to setting feasible limits and dealing with issues that make sense. We presumed that the satisfaction of basic needs of human beings plays a role as well as readiness to develop trust and take risks to attain effective cooperation, finding a meaning in one's own action, developing conditions for mental well-being, raising educational potential or linking up networks (a talent younger people obviously have developed better). It is apparent from various examples in the public eye in today's Germany that the pendulum of retrogressive retreat swings in equilibrium with progressive action and between

destructive and constructive tendencies (that are innate in both). There can be no forecast as to which behaviour is correct.

Faced with complexity and simultaneous levelling out of diversity we saw it as our task to maintain our capability to act or re-claim that capacity. It should not be forgotten that action-based orientation can only be provisional and never be totally right or wrong.

From this angle it appeared consistent that the final mood was almost at the same time aware that the outcome was open. One member coined an image: Our society of today can be compared to a privately owned ice-rink on which all the skaters circle around quite happily, although rumour has it that the rink owner is bankrupt and the safety of the ice-rink cannot be guaranteed.

It is remarkable that no word was lost on the shooting in Tucson, Arizona, nor on the Tunisian conflict of almost civil war dimensions which were the themes of the week's News.

Conveners: Barbara Schneider and Diethelm Sannwald