"Sweden and the World at the Dawn of 2011"
Report of a Listening Post held on 10th January in Stockholm

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 to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. We have identified the following themes:

- Alienation, poverty and darkness

- Generosity and kindness in contrast to plundering and exploitation

- Powerlessness, deficiencies and denial in contrast to desire and violence

- Splitting, fragmentation and superficiality in contrast to wholeness, depth and complexity

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post 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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Alienation, poverty and darkness

Analysis: The work was characterised by an early scenario of darkness and alienation and the feeling of living in a time gone by. Poverty, marginalisation and the difficulty of making one's voice heard led to experiences of fear and vulnerability. Examples of

phenomena in society mentioned in this context were: financial worry, deteriorating community care services and climate change. Sweden is currently experiencing a hard winter for the second year running with record low temperatures and great amounts of snow. The feeling of being in an unfamiliar situation makes it difficult to create a sense of meaning and easy to lose one's bearings on both an outer and inner plane.

Hypothesis: The notion of moving in darkness and ignorance leads to an all-embracing feeling of being imprisoned and without one's own voice in important situations. The feeling of loss also makes it natural to look back in time more frequently in order to retrieve what is lost. If one's actions are characterized by expectations of investigating the new, regardless of qualities, and abandoning parts of the old, the experience can be likened to that of betraying a dear friend.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Generosity and kindness as opposed to plundering and exploitation

Analysis: In contrast to the earlier themes of poverty and misery it was established that contributions to charity, and new forms of taking social responsibility in the community are increasing and that new forms of collectivism arise. A new sort of simple kindness and generosity in everyday life, amongst strangers was described with examples from the bus and shops, as well as new forms of bartering and primitive economy in a modern urban environment.

Experiences of the opposite sort in the form of exploitation and plundering were, at the same time, easy to recognize and had a powerful impact, amongst other things through the image of 'the vampire', which is currently a popular and attractive fantasy figure. The fear that individualism is only characterised by the striving after own profit was formulated.

Hypothesis: Dependency creates a fear of one's own capacity to influence and change. The uncertainty of human co-operation means that it is essential to have new experiences even though they can also be dangerous. The image of the vampire can take on the function of a sort of frightening halt sign concerning contact and change between people.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Powerlessness, deficiencies and denial
in contrast to desire and violence

Analysis: Powerlessness and lack of contact with the surrounding world was described as a consequence of altered power structures on both the outer and inner plane. Earlier well-known structures lose their sturdiness when 'the state retreats'. Economic and industrial centres are moved to other parts of the world and for us unfamiliar religions become increasingly present. The media's tendency to stereotypical reporting of catastrophes and conflicts reflects and interacts with society's fantasies and notions about both polarisation and uncontrollable wielding of power and greed.

Hypothesis: The feeling of solidarity, loyalty and own energy is affected when the individual's assets and limitations cannot be affirmed in a familiar way. An earlier experienced natural interaction between give and take, now when it is changed, instead

leads to society being characterised by the individual's perceptions of gulfs that are not easy to influence and risks of explosive deficiencies.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

Splitting, fragmentation and superficiality as opposed to wholeness, depth and complexity

Analysis: Relations between people are perceived often as increasingly superficial, demarcated and isolated. Here, above all, it is public contexts of various types that are described and, amongst other things, social media and the growing entertainment business. Important values in human intercourse, such as intimacy, freedom and contact find their place in new environments, for better and for worse. Face-book, computer games and other Internet-based activities presumably have the ability to capture the conflict-filled demand for intimacy, creativity and distance. Wholeness, depth and complexity find forms that still can be difficult to discover and invest with trust.

Hypothesis: When our basic needs for survival are threatened we create defences against the perceived danger inherent in abandoning old, previously well-functioning and ingrained patterns. Fragmentation and splitting, easily visible in the public debate but also in various encounters between people, can be such defences and lead to difficulties in seeing and coping with essential new circumstances for our continued existence. Depth and complexity become neglected as a result of threatening experiences created by the new circumstances. To create a secure period of apprenticeship is not compatible with the nature of the problem; survival is dependent upon how we can make experiences by meeting and being in the danger.

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