

## "Britain and the World at Spring 2008"



### 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 experiences in their various social roles (work, unemployment, retirement, religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary, leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities). This part was largely concerned with people's everyday life experiences, as it related to the 'socio' or 'external lives' of the participants.

#### Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In this part, the aim was to collectively identify the major themes which had emerged from Part 1.

##### 1. Shifting Boundaries/ Appearance of Choice

The content revolved around the shifting of boundaries and positions. Gordon Brown is shifting position on many issues, likened to volatile shifting sand. Unthought through decisions on Bio fuels leading to unforeseen shortages of food. The introduction of Congestion Charging has subsequently put pressure on the tube system – solving one problem whilst creating another. One member reported having to increasingly wait for the 3rd train and then forcing oneself on. We cannot rely on familiar structures – trains not reliable, crumbling structures of work-life, Universities tired and crumbling.

We are faced with many contradictions – for example London winning the Olympics but ratepayers told lies about costs, nobody is seeking our views, Livingston said it was in his manifesto! Can we trust what we are told? One member pointed to how in the recent murder of the student in Italy the police had made up their mind and then looked for the evidence to confirm their belief.

Global shifting boundaries and structures – Chinese have a bigger development aid budget than the World Bank – driven by their voracious demand for resources in the 3rd World indicates their shifting position in the world order.

##### 2. Connectedness/ Disconnectedness – do I belong?

One member's pre-occupation was about not being respected, getting pushed around, having to manage himself and a professional. What this means? Do they understand who they are talking to and how they are connected?

Who represents us? This prompted comments about the London Mayoral elections and how we relate to the candidates. There have been some good outcome from Ken Livingstone's time as mayor, the buses transformed but it comes at a cost of pressure on transport elsewhere. Boris seen as a personality but we are faced with no discussion of issues. Concerns that decisions are made without understanding the issues – issues viewed at the level of 'London Lite' – no understanding of policy but viewed at the level of personality. But are they Mavericks or Narcissists can we trust them?

This reference to Mavericks also focused on George Galloway he was recently hit by a ball thrown from a window when campaigning ( suggestion by one member he is in touch with Muslim community and can speak to their experience). He was described as a captivating challenging and passionate speaker in the pursuit of truth. The mavericks, including Rufus May radical psychologist who appeared in recent television programme, who disturb the status quo – but is there something suspect about them both – have we got it right? There was also a reference to Hillary Clinton and Obama and how decision about what they stand for is decided?

Politicians being bought off we are being managed like call centres – management not politics. Politics as ethics we have subcontracted it, do we understand what Government stands for and how do we have and participate in a democracy?

### 3. *Hearing Voices/ not being heard – who represents me, related theme of too many voices*

Reference to TV programme the Doctor Who Heard Voices. What does it mean to hear voices – literally and metaphorically? How do individuals and groups get heard? Psychiatrist on the programme does not recommend telling the truth about mental health history.

Half million funding disappeared from HE as the emphasis has shifted to qualifications. There is an increasing emphasis on recruitment and marketing rather than learning.

A reference made to Gordon Brown meeting IMF. How are these groups appointed – getting further and further away from democracy? Who has real influence? Where is democracy in a global world? What can we do as individuals – try and do something. Is there because of globalisation an increasing Democratic deficit as unelected people making major decisions?

Pensioners where given as an example of a group not having a strong voice. How do they exist? What does old age mean – are we too lazy to look at the facts about an increasingly aging society? Alistair Campbell made a comment some time ago about people living too long.

Do we get the politicians we deserve – narcissistic and manipulative – are our voices/ minority voices heard/not heard – what about the power of one?

### 4. *Reference Points*

In a changing world what are our reference points? One member pointed to St

Georges Day and flags flying over Government buildings. What is it to be English? Flying the flag – who identifies with Englishness? A member referred to Trevor Philips take on multi culturalism and how Enoch Powel had stopped thinking and discussion on race and immigration – this was making it difficult to talk about race and immigration now.

Are we finding it difficult to locate ourselves in a changing environment? – one a member talked about a visit to Peter Doig exhibition of landscapes – where am I in this Landscape? – as a citizen he found different ways of relating to old reference points.

Are relationships changing – young use texting to stay in contact maintain relationships – travelling light letting go, blurring of public and private. Is texting a way of avoiding relationships or a new way of maintaining them?

### **Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post, members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2 with a view to collectively identifying the underlying conscious and unconscious dynamics that might be predominant at the time, and developing hypothesis as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here, 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**

##### ***Analysis***

Global economic and political changes are leading to a reorganising of the world order with China and India beginning to challenge the western economies. These changes are impacting on social structures and are leading to questions about how far National Governments are effective in managing or controlling these global changes. The experience of the 'credit crunch' following the sub prime mortgage crisis has led to world wide repercussions that impact all of us. This is creating a sense that familiar structures are crumbling which impacts on our social and personal reference points and our sense of our identity. This is leading to a retreat into individualism and local identities as a way of defending against the fear of having no control over the events that impact our lives.

##### ***Hypothesis***

Because of economic and political changes at a Global and National Level we can no longer rely on familiar reference points and structures to anchor our identity this leads to an anxiety and fear that is difficult to articulate and is leading to a society that is increasingly atomised and disconnected.

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

##### ***Analysis***

We no longer trust our politicians who seem inconsistent and shift their views based on public opinion. Decisions they make often have unintended

consequences leaving the electorate wondering if they are capable of making important decisions or of understanding the complexity of the issues they are trying to address. Increasingly we feel lied to, manipulated and managed as though we are in a 'call centre' rather than governed and lead. Major decisions on the world stage are increasingly made by unelected people leaving national politicians impotent in the face of Global issues. There is therefore a retreat from engaging in the political process and we are getting the politicians we deserve with an emphasis on personality and entertainment value rather than political gravitas and sound policies.

### ***Hypothesis***

Because we are increasingly sceptical about the ability of politicians and political institutions to hear our voices and represent our interests there is an increasing retreat into electing politicians based on personality rather than policies this is further undermining democratic processes.

**Convener:** James Slater