"Britain and the World Summer 2003"
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 16th July
from 7:00pm to 9:30pm
College Hall, University of London,
Malet Street, London WC1E 7HZ

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. On this occasion, themes can be drawn together as the following four interrelated statements:

(a) *Uncertainty & Insecurity.*
Members expressed their difficulties associated with not understanding the changes occurring in society at both a national and global level. This led to confusion and to a fear of confusion, a not knowing, which leads to a situation where we are left holding middle ground - a very immature position. The insecurity is added to by those in national and global positions of authority who are seen to be wielding power in a regressive manner. This results in power being seen to be perverse. For leaders and for members of society there is a sort of defensive flight into certainty as a defence against not knowing. Added to this, are the moral dilemmas around the issue of interdependency between nations.

(b) *Institutional Leadership.*
Members expressed a lack of trust in all manner of institutional leaders, in particular, political and religious leaders of all faiths who were seen to be abusing their powers. Albeit, that this was largely considered to be as a result of our idealisation of those concerned which then resulted in those leaders becoming omnipotent. The members were very aware of the way that leaders and the led are used and how we imprison them in their role. In particular, of the way that a large proportion of society are content to take up a followership role so that we can project our disowned parts into leaders. The problem is that those leaders then become the creatures of the followers.

(c) *Language of Anglosphere.*
This was a term introduced by one member which other members seemed to identify with. The term relates to the perceived abuse of power by western politicians. It is a

sphere where a demand for obedience by Anglosphere politicians leads to a loss of internal authority and a lack of awareness of difference and diversity. It is about the 'good father' who becomes disrespectful of his children leaving them feeling manipulated. It is a world full of paternalism, and patronising behaviour, and behind it all lies cynicism. A Dutch member felt that it was a denial of Anglo Saxon, the emphasis being on Anglo. In European terms it helped him to view, for example, the Belgians who were in the middle between the Germanic and Latin races. And this was made more difficult because the Calvanistic and Catholic religions encourage and mark the split. Social leaders defend their dependency on the church by advertising their religious ties. This was then linked to how and why Tony Blair publicly justifies his views and actions by advertising his religious ties, which came across as showing a direct contact with the divine and more
evidence that British leadership can't help to compete with the Vatican (even when one is Roman Catholic informed).

(d) *Not Taking Own Authority*.
Members expressed their discomfort with their inability to challenge those in authority and to take their own authority. It was felt that one of the reasons for this was a difficulty of articulating our underlying distress. Action was regarded as not being possible - individuals cannot act. A further thought was expressed regarding the example of speed cameras which are now used to enforce us. A result is that we are controlled and no longer able to decide for ourselves (that we should obey the speed limit). Impotence was seen as a new form of consciousness splitting, whereby we back off from any form of consideration of future acts as a defence against the anxiety of confronting the unknown.

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 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. 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 three interrelated hypotheses:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: The 'Nanny State'. This analysis started with the notion of the way that traffic cameras have increased our dependency and reduced our autonomy. It was realised that we were subject to many manifestations of control. The fast moving, fast paced, world means that their is little or no room for reflection. In its own way this was a form of control. The uninformed (perhaps dis-informed) debate about the Iraq situation and the need for a quick fix was also seen as a form of control. The loss of student grants resulted in a form of control that leads to plagiarism. Each of us may have particular concerns about particular areas of societal (political) control, but all of us will be subject to the totality of control. A problem is that because of the maternalistic approach taken, the means and areas of control are often put forward as highly

beneficial to one and all, or are 'spun' in such a way. Being perceived as beneficial the down side is seldom realised at the time initiatives are introduced.

Hypothesis: The externalisation of control only serves to increase the problem by making members of society dependent. The reduction of external control would lead to increased self control - or autonomy - and responsibility for one's own actions.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: Authority and Responsibility. This hypothesis derives out of the above, when a member asked why does the 'Nanny State' exist? It was felt that much was to do with the perceived uncertainty and insecurity of the world at this time. One member talked of 'future shock' and others felt that the future looked a grim prospect. There was considerable anxiety about future survival and a lack of trust or faith in 'wise parents'. It was expected that people in authority would behave in a reliable and responsible manner but we had become dis-illusioned and dis-idealised. At this point it was realised that members of society also had a part to play in this process. However, there was a strong appreciation that taking one's authority also meant taking responsibility. Nelson Mandela was held up as a role model as was the 'truth and reconciliation' process. In particular, it was realised that taking one's own authority meant a move away from splitting and projection into others and an acceptance that 'good' and 'bad' both exist side by side and that an acceptance of this can lead to taking one's authority and responsibility.

Hypothesis: Because of the perceived uncertainty and insecurity of the world at this time there is a high level of anxiety about future survival. One of the ways that society has dealt with that anxiety, is by dependently displacing it onto political, religious and other leaders who have been regarded as some sort of protectors and saviours (much in line with Bion's Basic Assumption activity). However, there is a growing realisation that these societal leaders are no more able to do this than society itself. In this light we believe that there is an ever increasing understanding that we must all take back our projections, accept our responsibility and take our own authority for dealing with these problems.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: Despair. There was a strong feeling that world leaders had hijacked the global process. This was so regarding: world trade, the fight against aids, greenhouse gasses and the Iraq war. It was felt that Britain went to war without the authority of the people. The effect of this hijacking of the process is that members are left in a considerable moral dilemma - do they support their Government or reject it. In which case they may be regarded as disloyal. In desperation, members sought refuge in the past - to go back to 'as it was' - but soon realised that this was not possible. They also realised that the instruments of the past were of no help in addressing the issues of today. It was a great source of anxiety to realise that nothing in our history was helpful to today. It was felt that we have lost our craft and our creative skills, or as one person put it 'there is nothing in our heads'. In addition, we are left in such unfamiliar territory,

that like the experience of 'culture shock', many familiar objects have been removed and are no longer available for our projections. We are, therefore, left with our anxieties, we have to take back our projections and live with them. In the previous analysis someone had asked 'How do young people view the world?' This was now brought up again as we once more went into dependency, this time dependency on the young generation, 'the angels' as they were referred to, who it was felt would deal with all problems on our behalf.

Hypothesis: The feeling of despair that arises from societal experiences of being totally inadequate and without the skills or mental capacity to understand what is happening leads to Basic Assumption Dependency behaviour. Initially, society mobilised politicians as the 'dependency leader' but the perceived hijacking by these crazy leaders resulted in their rejection. Left, then, with the original problem of despair, the anxiety is so great that there is again a regression to Basic Assumption behaviour. Now, society mobilise youth as their saviour.

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