

**"Britain and the World
at Summer 2009"**
Report of a Listening Post held in June



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 this part, the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following two interrelated themes.

1. Greed, Guilt and Disillusionment

The session began with a number of members relating their experiences to the recent local and European Parliament elections. One had attended a play on the eve of the election. It was about an international observer becoming embroiled in a crusade to get people to vote in an African State. He was struck with the risk and personal turmoil the voters underwent and a statement made – “you know you've got true democracy when you get too bored to vote.” He had also seen a film on the eve of the Listening Post about a man who had cut himself off from society and was talking gibberish with only moments of lucidity. His feelings of being totally alone not knowing what direction to take seemed to the member, to link to the election in that we have lost something and don't know what to do about it. The member had asked himself, “do we value democracy?”

One of the group felt guilty when she realised she hadn't allowed time to arrange a postal vote and another member stated that there should be collective shame in respect of electing candidates who don't believe in the European Parliament. Someone else spoke about a small group talking angrily about the parliamentary expenses scandal and the recession at the polling station and one of them said they had used their vote to 'show them! She was taken aback as she had never witnessed such behaviour at a polling station before, it had always seemed such a silent process. Linking to this another member stated she had no idea who to vote for but when she saw the BNP at the top of the sheet she quickly made up her mind.

A member said that she had found it difficult to understand the outrage against bankers and politicians by the press and members of society as she had always really known, and

been somewhat ambivalent about their greed and lack of ethical behaviour. While it was 'hidden' and her own life was OK then it was easy to ignore. It was only when it was 'outed' that she felt vulnerable and then ashamed of her own greed and collusion.

It was clear that there was collusion between the parties. The political differences between them were also no longer clear, everyone occupies centre stage.

She was bemused by all these angry reactions. She stated that 92% of the time she was honest but if her handbag were stolen she might embellish the claim form by 2% and justify it to herself. Her view was that politicians are there to represent us and some, say 5%, are dishonest. They should not be idealised as they are human like the rest of us. What really made her laugh was those who drove the witch hunt, journalists, are well known for claiming large amounts of expenses.

Another member interjected, stating that the whole country wanted to be a lynch mob, all our anger was displaced into the politicians and as a result of this Darling and Brown had done a 180% turn. "This all started with us, we wanted everything and we wanted it cheap and now its gone."

This was linked, by another member, to Germany after the first world war and the allies forcing Germany to pay which led to the second world war.

One of the group described his driveway as being out of control with weeds. His wife didn't like it but he hadn't minded. His wife used a weed killer that guaranteed no more weeds for five years! He stated that weeds have a place in this world. Politicians and bankers have a place in the world. They are a useful receptacle for all our projections.

Another member recalled that after Lehman Brothers collapsed head hunters gathered at Carluccio's Restaurant to cream off the top talent, only those at the bottom of the pile were losing their jobs.

All over the world people are suffering for what has been done.

2. Hope, Idealisation and Degradation

One of the group remembered that at her first performance on Britain's got talent, Susan Boyle was laughed and jeered at as she came onto the stage. The looks of astonishment, incredulity and then joy when she sang were immediate and the resultant press coverage shot her to fame. It was great that someone who didn't fit the celebrity mould, someone ordinary, could have such power. Millions of people all over the world were enthralled with the power of her voice on U Tube and a contract worth 8 million pounds was mooted.

She was set up as a container for hope worldwide but on losing in the final she had a very public breakdown. It then seemed from the outset that they were not loving in their hearts towards her and they were just using her as a temporary place in which we could invest all our hope.

Other members then linked their own thoughts about Susan Boyle and other prominent figures. She is not protected and will never be a star she is just being exploited. She will still make lots of money though. Even Gordon Brown got sucked into the fantasy and was ridiculed by the media. Her story now relies on the difficulty of her life.

It was the same with Britney, people hoped she would be as good as she used to be but her concert was a disappointment.

Look at the President of Venezuela, an ordinary man from a poor background trying to do good. He contains the hopes of many people but is struggling to cope with greater forces that are opposed to what he wants to achieve. Then he made a continuous 48 hour television programme about himself which undermined his successes and popularity in many peoples minds.

One member thought that President Obama was offering hope about the Muslim issue but another member asked, what will happen if he becomes very successful?

Members of society don't enjoy success. Success is not a permanent state its about ambiguity and therefore uncertainty. People are looking for a saviour only to crucify them.

“Is this all that members of society can come up with? A collective fantasy world where individuals are idealised to carry all the projections. What is the preoccupation, that reality will break through and people won't know what it will be?”

Another member who works in the NHS related that about two weeks ago they were told that the money would run out by 2012. She said that it hadn't sunk in at the time but had become real when she heard it on the television some time later. She recognised that this information was being stated as a fact and not as a political issue. She wondered what was going to happen to the most vulnerable people. Will they be left till last? She felt a great sense of loss as the NHS were already struggling to give a service. Surely there was money elsewhere that could be used?

Linking to this, she had also had an image of two gents in a 'man's' club swilling whisky, one was the minister of pensions the other the minister of health. They were discussing whether to keep people alive.

One of the group wondered whether euthanasia would become legal as was the case in Holland and if so would the state have a say in when people will die or will it be for individuals to determine.

Other members added their thoughts on the NHS and other related issues. There will be added pressure on management to find a 'new way' of running the NHS. Would the services be slimmed down and the wastage of drugs be addressed. The pharmaceutical companies make their massive profits by built in obsolescence. They will have to make changes to the way they operate?

One member knew of someone who had given up their job in a Bank to look into the Criminal Justice System.

Jack Straw has intimated that there will be no money to support the probation service and there will be a cut back in the training of probation officers.

In the Mirror today there was an article on 50 best ways of saving money – don't go to the shop, eat what's left in the fridge. It would seem that the whole mind set on managing resources effectively is out of kilter. There appears to be an endless supply of corrupt officials in every system.

Where is there a repository of hope? Members of society keep looking for something good and keep reality checking.

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 dynamics both conscious and unconscious that might be predominant at the time, and developing hypotheses 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. On this occasion the members identified two interrelated hypotheses as follows:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

The Lack of containment – greed, guilt and disillusionment

Analysis: Because of the major changes occurring in our world on a daily basis, globalization, the shift of power amongst nations, the resultant national and international political turmoil, the worldwide recession and most recently in the UK the constant and detailed 'outing' of the greed and unethical practices in both commercial and state institutions, huge questions have been raised in the minds of citizens as to whether those who lead and govern have the capability and moral fortitude to embrace and deal effectively with the needs of society.

The illusion that we are being looked after by the state and it will all be back to normal soon, has been shattered. With this new awareness, members of society can no longer overlook, ignore or deny the corruption that has been occurring which means they cannot disown or deny their own greed and unacceptable behaviour.

Members of society have let the politicians hide things from them. This leaves nowhere and no-one in which to place their dependency. They can only look inwards and no longer deny their personal responsibility or remain ambivalent to what they have colluded with. They have to face their own human weaknesses. As a member stated "people all over the world are suffering for what we have done." The acceptance that leaders are human and not superhuman produces feelings of fear, disillusion and impotence and it becomes difficult to get involved or think rationally as evidenced in respect of the different experiences members had in voting in the recent elections.

Hypothesis: Because of the continuing failures in our national institutions it is almost impossible for the provision of containment that addresses the reasonable dependency needs of society. The resultant feelings of mistrust, vulnerability and impotence causes members of society to create an 'organisation in the mind' which is a generalised fantasy about the containers. Members of society have nowhere to put their dependency so they 'retreat into their shells.' In facing their own frailty their dependency increases, and in their shame they project their rage back into the institutions and leaders that they depend on so that they can disown their own greed and culpability.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Annihilation and the fantasy of hope

Analysis: Members of society experience the difficulty and challenges in knowing what to hope for or who to invest their hope in. With the threat of the collapse of established institutions such as the banks, the NHS and our parliamentary system, and with no guidance from their leaders as to what will happen in the future they need to find something or someone to invest their hopes in.

To hope for nothing is despair. Leaving hope to chance is not an option as it leads to feelings of hopelessness and to annihilation. Members of society cannot base their hopes on guess work or don't knows. Is there more hope in the unknown than in what is in front of us or is the 'unknown' so terrifying that reality has to be suspended for as long as possible?

The media, and especially the 'reality' programmes offer up opportunities to idealise individuals such as Susan Boyle and use them as containers of hope. However, these are only temporary and illusory containers. They have little to with reality but are a way to live out our fantasies. By carrying all these fantasies these individuals are more than likely to fail and that is when members of society are faced with the the reality of 'the unknown' again.

Hypothesis: Because of the constant and fundamental changes to our way of life, members of society are unable to make sense of the current situation or predict the future. It would appear that there is also an experience of leaders who openly express that they have no real answers to the problems being faced and no real ideas about how to do things differently, but only that things must change. This leaves members of society hopeless and helpless. A better future seems almost impossible. As a result members of society are constantly faced with disillusionment which is dealt with by viewing government and other societal leaders as persecutory.

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