



AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Canada and the World at the Dawn of 2017  
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®  
held in Toronto on 2 February 2017

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**PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & EXPERIENCES**

*In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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’: the ‘socio’ or ‘external’ world of participants.*

**PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

*In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

Many were reflecting on the current reality, which is experienced as increasing more challenging with a widening gap between those who have and those who do not. Participants commented that there are so few jobs, so little social security and growing poverty particularly for youth, while a very few ‘influentials’ live very well on Olympus. The reality is that so many poor and disenfranchised people, living on the street in Toronto and other parts of Canada are not able to get the help and support they need. There are clear winners and losers – where winners take all.

Related to this, some noted that there is no ‘gross national measure for wellness’ in Canada in a time when such a measure would help draw attention to the importance of wellness and happiness. If we had such a measure, we would see collectively how really difficult things are. But because others do not ‘see’ what’s going on in the world, we cannot ‘claim’ this reality secures more well-being collectively. We know people are starving, we don’t seem to be helping each other very effectively, but it seems only a few are aware of this although one participant commented on efforts in Canada to set a minimum and maximum income for all citizens. Another antidote for this dire context may come from a recent Harvard study, which indicated that health and happiness is enhanced by close relationships. One participant offered that schools should teach children how to work together and collaborate.

There is so much regulation in our systems such that more time is spent on recording activity rather than providing real care. Neo-liberalism has allowed for public assets to be taken over by private interests – we have a business agenda not a caring ideology.

Participants commented that there is so much conflict and violence in the world; as a result of media we can see this: we can and do have one foot in the larger world and one in our local world, just as Canadian McLuhan predicted - we are citizens of the world and local citizens as well. And all of this violence runs on energy extracted from the earth. The earth itself is being depleted and this depletion may have provoked 'panic'. We cannot rebuild the environment and while efforts are made to draw attention to climate justice, making use of celebrities such as Jane Fonda, seems to do very little in the face of such a recent government decision to support the gas pipeline.

There were concerns that social care and democracy itself is eroding completely. There seems to be a 'death of a more positive and hopeful way of life. This is felt as a death of 'progress' – a deeper sense of 'things no longer getting better' and loss of hope and resignation that nothing now can change. Some spoke of an increased resistant-dependence on politicians for solving problems that cannot even be articulated and so much influence in just one person or a small group. There was a growing feeling of fear and an 'instruction' via the media barrages that we should be afraid. The message is 'beware' – "you are one step away from danger". And at the same time, one becomes numb. No one or no system seems to be able to hold the government accountable.

Many expressed the urgent need to sit down and talk together, to build and rebuild relations and at the same time, its so difficult to come together which such paranoia and insecurity. There are some safe spaces for women but not enough.

### **Theme 1: Growing poverty with an accumulation of wealth and power 'at the top':**

Participants recognize the deepening gap between the many poor and a very few others. They see poverty around them, particularly for youth; they know of the lack of jobs and weak social networks and at the same time, the very wealthy and powerful accumulate more and more of without blatant disregard for others.

### **Theme 2: The elite promote fear and dependency:**

Participants commented on the unwillingness and outright refusal of those in positions of influence who could address the social circumstances around us but do not 'see'. They appear uncaring, but more, they promote a sense that we should be very frightened, reinforcing a sense of rageful helplessness, dependency and paranoia. And this leads to a deteriorating loss of hope and inability to form the very relations that would enhance inter-dependence and wellness.

### **Theme 3: Government serves the elites:**

The erosion of democracy was seen as continuing from prior years. Constitutional democracies (as we have seen from the election of Trump and Brexit) do not function 'democratically'. They are by and large captured by capitalist interests and continue to serve those in their circuits of interest. No one or no system seems to be able to hold the government accountable.

## **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

*In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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: Mourning the loss of the 'good-enough' other**

**Analysis 1:** The disparity between those who have and those do not, between those with opportunity versus those with no opportunity have deepened, leading to despair that the 'other' can be counted on or even related to with anything but rage and helplessness.

**Hypothesis 1:** Members continue to wish for the good-enough other but with less and less belief that this other will materialize. At the same time, we have become more and more dependently oriented to a 'bad other' and less and less able to make connections and build supportive relations with each other. Nonetheless, we believe that these connections are critical to sustain ourselves with each other in these times.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2. Fear and envy of the 'bad other'**

**Analysis 2:** We feel ourselves terrified by and envious of those on Olympus. Their greed, control over our lives, refusal to provide adequate care, and flagrant abuse of democratic processes has provoked enormous rage and envy. Their accumulation has meant less and less is available for any others. It is felt that this accumulation and greed arises from our tribal gathering impulses gone wild and from felt scarcity such that panic ensues and hoarding results. This is an artificial scarcity, resulting from the neo-liberalism business agenda, which frames 'extraction' as the mode of accumulation. It is not an ideology of care for citizens and for the earth.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3: Chronic despair**

**Analysis 3:** Faced with a cruel and 'withholding other', participants experience a chronic state of despair and dread. This feeling state makes it more and more difficult to build and sustain interpersonal and community relations. And as a result, more and more citizens experience mental health issues.

**Hypothesis 3:** Faced with a loss of the fantasy of safety and security, which should be provided by the 'good-enough other', primitive feelings of dread and annihilation emerge. The result is that subjects must confront the desire for a thing that does not exist

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