An Organisation for Promoting Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Canada at the Dawn of 2019

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND 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.

1.   There is a level of distraction that is present in the world:

Social media is playing a role in encouraging reactivity to current events rather than critical thought. In an environment permeated by"real" vs "fake" news it is more difficult to discern the attack on democracy that is being mounted. Critical thinking about ethics is becoming more difficult.

Technology supports individual desires to escape the direness of climate change; the loss of faith in public institutions to solve problems and redress social issues. Individual distraction is also a vehicle

2.   Loss of faith in public institutions to solve problems and redress social inequities

Trump is a symbol of not caring about humanity, about not having remorse. He represents the alliance between government and capitalism. Support from business supports specific candidates and parties so the election process does not represent the full spectrum of social interests. is not democratic,

Government is a site of institutional oppression and abuse. Government neglect of those living on the streets needing shelter and safe injections sites is abusive. There is less sense of sharing between people and social institutions and more

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violence in neighbourhoods in the past year. There is greater rigidity and more requests for accountability. Governments are playing a protective role in defining who came come in and out of the nation state. An example is Trump's desire for a wall between the United States and Mexico. Canada focusses media attention on one woman that they assisted rather than acknowledging who is being kept out.

So much uncertainty that planning and collective action seems impossible

There were questions about using a broader range of economic systems (barter, pay for the hours you work) that reflect a broader range of people's needs and abilities to work.

3.   Individualism and Community

People are social animals who need help from one another; forced into membership through this need. Different cultures place different value on community over individualism. Communities are hard to define as they exist in so many ways. They aren't just geographical.

It has become harder to involve people in community endeavours. People want to be left alone and have their individualism and autonomy respected rather than compromised. There is a Ministry of Loneliness; people don't talk to each other in their daily activities (taking the bus etc.) In a few instances there is an out pouring of kindness and assistance.

The system itself is a problem. A system based on majority rule can ignore and control the interests of the minority. We need to start with the premise that no one makes decisions for others. It is the individual's decision to decide where they belong.

There aren't the same experiments in how we might live differently that were present in Spain in the 1930's or in the 1960's

Key Themes

We are overloaded with information. Our capacity to think and make sense of the information is more difficult. It is more difficult to know what is true; what is important and how to keep our eye on what is important and to act on it. Facing the problems of the world is overwhelming so we seek distraction.

Loss of faith and interest in collective action as a source of assistance and how to improve people's circumstances. Community feels oppressive to individual autonomy and sense of ethics. Could there be another form of community and social institutions?

Greater rigidity in social institutions and borders with less sense of sharing and give and take. Society is becoming more polarized, more competitive and reactionary. Screens and masks become the primary form of relating to one

another. It is harder to align with the work of institutions.

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:
The social container is failing. There is a social tendency to retreat and abandon the social contract of government to follow the rules of democratic process. Increasingly, government uses whatever available means exist to advance their priorities rather than democratic debate, discussion and consensus building. The overwhelming amount of available information makes it more difficult to track the means through which existing social contracts are being dismantled. Without social agreements about the role of public institutions in defining and debating issues related to collective interests, it becomes more difficult to understand what is going on.

Hypothesis:
At the individual level there is a loss of attachment between the individual and the social contract resulting in less attachment to the broader society, greater social alienation and, preoccupations with personal autonomy and self-interest.

Analysis:
Society's problems are deepening without apparent solutions and a rise in flight/fight social defenses. This can be seen in the protectionism of borders, capitalism's interests, and individual autonomy. Public institutions become more rigid, requiring more accountability resulting in a further loss of attachment between the individual and the community.

Hypothesis:
Individuals and social trends are moving from Klein's depressive position that can tolerate ambivalence and the consensus building of democratic processes to the paranoid schizoid defensive position in which fear and aggression create a polarized other.

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