

REPORT  
OF  
A LISTENING POST

“SWEDEN AND THE  
WORLD AT THE DAWN  
OF 2004” – Lund (1)

MONDAY 19<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2004 from 7.00pm to 9.30pm

ARCANA OFFICE AT SANDGATAN 14 IN LUND, SWEDEN

CONVENOR

Stefan Jern

*Listening Posts are based on the notion that a group of people meeting together to work in the way described below allows the unconscious expression of some characteristics of the wider social system and the experience of the Listening Post is itself, therefore, relevant to an understanding of society beyond individual and personal preoccupations.*

*The aim of the Listening Post is to enable participants as individual citizens to reflect on their own relatedness to society and to try to develop an understanding of what is happening in society at this moment.*

*The Listening post will provide an opportunity for participants to share their preoccupations in relation to the various societal roles they may have. Collectively they are invited to try to identify the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at this time.*

REPORT

**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, irrespective of which these may be. It turned out that the seven participants were mainly psychologists/psychotherapists in their fifties who initially tended to view the world through their patients' eyes. This part was largely concerned with changes taking place in Sweden from the 1950:ies until today.

Among other areas reference was made to the crumbling away from inside of social institutions such as prisons and schools which creates an inhuman pressure on those working in them; irresponsibility of management; the expulsion of whistle-blowers; language becoming meaningless and nonsensical; Sweden a country isolated from the world since the 16<sup>th</sup> century forced into contact; a process of abolishing shame, guilt and responsibility in society; the downfall of the monopolies; life becoming an individual project where unhappiness is a failure (especially for the young); Swedes left to manage life on their own after the abolition of Christianity, Hell and The Devil; no grand ideas left; the devaluation and killing of our heroes Hammarskjöld, Wallenberg, Palme and Lindh; idealisation of 1954 ( "the peak year of the Swedish Welfare State"); quiet life in Lund (the small university town) and dangerous life in Malmö (the large city with immigrant ghettos) and an irrational immigration policy.

## **Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The, perhaps defensive, initial position of viewing "the world through their patients' eyes" changed into taking up citizens' roles. Here seven or eight themes were presented but rather difficult to condense into a manageable few. In retrospect the most significant was:

(a) After WW II Sweden managed to maintain a relatively isolated status from the world by a strong economy, political neutrality and an idealistic internationalism coupled with strong and widely shared materialistic and dechristianised values with roots dating back to the 30:ies. The country was ethnically and culturally homogenous and monopolies and institutions strong, influential and well defended. The large baby boom generation attacked institutions and outdated authority in the late 60:ies and early 70:ies but presented no valid alternative. Starting in the 80:ies and culminating after the fall of the Wall the isolation was no longer possible to uphold. Globalisation of the economy, technological and political change has transformed the country in depth. Old patterns, structures and values are gone, sense-making has become extremely difficult and the world and the country are perceived as unpredictable and void of meaning especially to the older generations who also experience difficulties in understanding the "individualistic" young.

## **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. This turned out to be a difficult task as a certain degree of disconnectedness or even fragmentation, which pervaded the whole Listening Post, lingered on. Focus was more on Sweden than on the world. Nuclei of hypotheses were tested out however and may be summarised as follows in two tightly interrelated hypotheses:

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 1.**

***Analysis:*** It was obvious that the political leadership has advanced longer than Swedes in general in their efforts to connect Sweden to Europe and the world, i.e. in tearing down boundaries, which have provided us with a feeling of protection against evil (which could always be located 'abroad'). In this process goals have been preserved but means and resources have changed, decreased or disappeared under the pressure of global economy. The situation was described as if the social contract had been broken off by the state but is still honoured by the citizens. It is as if a new and foreign language is spoken and one cannot be certain of what is being expressed and it becomes extremely difficult to re-create meaning in Society. We tend to look at the world as through someone else's eyes, maybe with disbelief, maybe with fear and maybe with anger but certainly without knowing what our impressions mean. It is also extremely difficult to locate anger, protest and collective voices. If collective protest comes around (the EMU referendum) it is hardly noticed and seems to have no consequences.

***Hypothesis:*** The slow, hidden and threatening changes are noted, and widely complained over, but little action follows. One rationalisation is that there is no use in protesting, no targets available and no response. A people in a long-standing state of dependency (protection by good parents-politicians) believe themselves to have been cheated and feels betrayed. There seems to be no one in authority (good or bad) to turn to. Initially anger is denied through a state of resignation where rage is not far from the surface however. It may be that this anger is projected into "the new Swedes" who act out Ba Fight through violence (rape, murder, robbery) leaving people in an empty, hopeless and innocent state evacuated of belongingness, spirituality and commitment (maybe a schizoid stance).

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

***Analysis:*** The members reflected on belonging to the generation born during WWII and noticed that some had been active in the student protests of the 60:ies and 70:ies. The revolt against authority then was also an attack on the institutions and structures of the Welfare State, which are now crumbling and dying – maybe for other reasons than this uprising (Cf Hypothesis 1). This was perceived both as a loss of something (meaning?, security?) which is occurring now and a liberation from something (restrictions?, oppression ?) which took place then. It is difficult to see what good has replaced the

disappearing structures and values. No grand systems or ideas have appeared to substitute the old ones. However a younger member of the group seemed able to identify areas where something new is emerging, e.g. the anti-globalisation movement, anti-consumism and anti-capitalism. But these movements are hampered by a rage-driven resignation.

***Hypothesis:*** The perhaps necessary attack and destruction of outdated institutions and forms of authority (Ba Fight) of the late 60:ies in combination with the “imported” breakdown of boundaries in the 80:ies and 90:ies have caused the death of a way of life (Ba Dependency) which cannot be mourned by those who feel responsible and who could take responsibility. One reason for this inability to mourn may be the difficulties created by the processes described above under Hypothesis 1. (I.e. if rage cannot be experienced as belonging to oneself there is no guilt, no responsibility, no mourning, no reparation and action). This absence of conscious guilt (and maybe shame) has been projected into actors in the new economy, politicians and other in leading and managerial positions who are then experienced as persecuting objects. No real and meaningful encounters are possible. Hope is consequently split off to another (younger) generation (maybe on a Ba Pairing basis). Here also a true collaboration between younger and older is difficult as the young generation is viewed as extremely individualistic (life as a project for success).