

**"Chile and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"**
Report of a Listening Post
held in January



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 for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

1. **Society's dehumanization**
2. **Unsuccessful leadership, anomy and helplessness.**
3. **Attachment to society and contradictions**

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Society's dehumanization

Analysis: The group of participants feels overwhelmed by Chilean society's dehumanization that expresses itself in the deterioration of the quality of life in the citizens. Social relationships are considered poor because of their superficiality and instrumentability. Besides, human encounters are strictly regulated. All these factors interfere with a genuine human contact and its open acceptance. Dehumanization implies even the neglect against oneself, while, needs, aspirations and authentic emotions make us live as robots since people are subjugated to the values and norms established by the ruling culture. Social relationships are based on a logic pertaining to the powerful groups that, according to their interests, control the dynamics of the Chilean society. In the deepest thoughts there is the belief that societies nest primitive and uncontrollable evil forces that, in case of being unleashed, do not measure the damage they can provoke. The group refers particularly to the impact the Middle East armed conflict between Israel and Palestine has in Chile. In the case of Israel people observe the use of excessive, aggressive and merciless force against the Palestinian

people in Gaza. This conflict also echoes in Chile when it rouses the antagonisms between Jewish and Palestinian immigrants living long ago in the country. Group participants attending the Listening Post feels horrified when a Chilean Jewish, in his workplace, has expressed the solution to the conflict is the extermination of the Palestinian people. The group shows affliction due to people's incapacity to think and realize how we are bounded to each other, how apathy and indifference invades us blocking our capacity to accept others or protest and change what is unacceptable. It is considered that human beings are incapable of learning from wars, revolutions and holocaust horrors that have affected mankind. It is frightening to think the way decisions are taken in society to mobilize masses in order to commit outrages. The group is perplexed by evilness societies can develop when taking part in these actions, especially when there is an incapability of thinking and putting words together that may profoundly express why human beings can take out such an amount of aggression on their fellow men and women. The incapability of thinking makes difficult to understand the gloomiest and darkest sides of society, which in turn prevents people to understand who the enemies to combat are. Worst aspects of society contaminate with remarkable effectiveness people's behaviour and spread the germs that incite them to act fiendishly.

Hypothesis: Dehumanization and evilness citizens attribute to society refer to a persecution anxiety individuals experience in their internal worlds. They resist the reality that dehumanization and evilness is deeply rooted within themselves. They refuse to accept that the aggressive, destructive and chaotic potential towards their fellows belongs to the human condition we all embrace and cannot escape. By the contrary, individuals use splitting, projection, repression, identification and rationalization to refuse dehumanization and evilness. The conflict between Jewish and Palestine people becomes an adequate target for individuals to attach evilness to that tragic situation. Israel particularly embodies all forces of evilness while Palestinians personify the suffering victims that undergo violence and death unleashed by those powerful forces. Individuals, through their psychic defenses, protect themselves against the anxiety produced by the fact of ascertain their own evilness and its potential of being revealed by the commission or omission of specific actions. By doing this, individuals manage to keep 'clean' their own identity and avoid to face guiltiness and responsibility regarding human decomposition of the Chilean society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Unsuccessful leadership, anomy and helplessness

Analysis: A second issue the group pays attention to is the scepticism in the common good that is supposed to encourage the Chilean society, its public authorities, corporate executives and citizens. Those attending the Listening Post feel lonely, abandoned, lost and incapable of knowing how to behave within a society that, in turn, confuses them in terms of their identity, their moral, and where they belong and where they do not. Leadership in society has underwent a growing decomposition and notables – which at one point managed to build people's hope about a better, collective and more egalitarian life – nowadays have weakened against the power of influence due to their incapability to fulfill the promises they made. Leadership in society is perceived as corruption or, at least, as a condition that bring people close to the possibility of committing it and ceased to take any part in people's problems and needs, often encouraged by the use of deceived power among elitist groups and political parties that negotiate behind the backs of the great majority to benefit a minority, in part, because common people cannot take part in the making of decisions. In this scenario, democracy becomes a

farce, including rituals that are respected but which in fact belong to an authoritarian regime that excludes citizens from being heard regarding their interests and thoughts.

The political situation within a society produces a great amount of anxiety since people feel the lack of a proper leadership. Individuals find themselves orphans from leaders to believe in, coherent from a moral point of view and strong enough to fulfil the common good ideals.

In the Listening Post it is set out that the power held by the US government, other world powers and big international corporations is huge and insuperable. Here is where real decisions affecting the whole world are taken. Among these centres of worldwide power and local elites in Chile there is an ideological coherence that allows a synchronized control of Chilean people's behaviour. When facing these huge forces individuals feel helplessness due to the impossibility of change anything. The system allows superficial changes but not deeper ones that may modify the political structures that hold the international and local established order. People feel they face overwhelming powers, and individuals are insignificant compared to them since the value of human beings is related to nothing but figures and their use with instrumental purposes, according to the market fundamentals.

Consumerism happens to be the only domain where common individuals are able to take autonomous decisions. Nevertheless, these decisions have evil effects due to the instrumentation of people when forced to the dynamic of requesting financial credits that may allow them to buy expensive goods, which, in turn, suffocate them when having to pay the credits back. The new US president elect, Obama, brings encouraging feelings that lighten the sorrow Chilean people feel towards the huge power asymmetry with world power governments, corporations, local elites and capitalism as such. People wish they had a Chilean Obama whom to trust in and someone that might fill them with hope, dreams and ideals toward achieving a more humanitarian, fair and supportive society. Individuals develop the suspicion if Obama and his collaborator are able to successfully face the political managements that, in the shadow of the institutions, rule the world's people.

Hypothesis: Among Chilean citizens there is a huge unease related to the dissatisfaction of needs and the lack of leaders that bring order, clarity, security and protection from a globalized chaotic and nihilistic world. When dependence is not being fulfilled it activates severe persecutory anxieties among people which leads to the unconscious use of primitive psychic mechanisms that extremely distort perceptions, thoughts and behavior against the overwhelming reality of Chile nowadays. Individuals have a tendency to look for and find scapegoats to release in them all the responsibilities for the sorrows affecting them. They fall into sophisticated fantasies that create possible reasons to explain the impotence they go through in their personal life that prevent them from taking care of themselves, of what is going on in the society and to assume an active and smart position towards solving problems and challenges. Schizoid state, dominating people, generates severe persecutory feelings that are projected in external objects, which individuals tend to attribute such a huge controlling capacity that it justifies inactiveness and impotence. Identification with the president of the US, Barack Obama, generates hopes of a new world order, fair and equal, whose effects can also get to Chile, thus providing the leadership needed to satisfy the strong need for dependence among the citizens.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Attachment to society and contradictions

Analysis: Other issues discussed at Listening Post are the ambivalences, conflicts and contradictions that people live by taking part in society. This is closely linked to aspects of the two subjects discussed above – dehumanization and impotence. When dealing with society, individuals face the extreme choice of being a part of it or stay out of it, while it is really complex to find the third option that combines aspects of belonging to society and, at the same time, having room to exist with differentiation factors. Society is perceived as essentially coercive, it forces people to absorb the existing culture without reflexion; its goal is to homogenize the people's minds and bodies so there is a common denominator in the way they feel, think and act. Society uses surveillance, reward and punishment so individuals get in line with its expectations, and people specially consider that within society emotions are sophisticatedly controlled in pursuit of that goal. On one hand, control operates addictively stimulating pleasure and hedonism, by allowing and boosting consumerism. Access to consumer goods and services is unlimited because the availability of Money is not a problem as long as there is a huge supply of financial loans. Hedonism and pleasure force people into being 'good citizens,' bow to employment discipline and labor, which are key drivers of the enjoyment of consumption.

'Good citizens' are rewarded with recognition as part of the system, which provides them with identity, order and both symbolic and material prizes. The system lets people know the risks they face should they detour from social expectations: unemployment, exclusion and other effects that can destabilize the people's identity and family life. Behind these risks the individuals are guilt and fear of failure to fulfill society's expectations, jeopardize their jobs, family life and the enjoyments arising from inclusion. Individuals feel the pressure of the system on coercive submission, which produces uneasiness and anger, because it limits the chances of autonomy. Eventually, people drift between submission to the system or distance from it as a way to be different. Apparently, this dilemma is normally solved through subjugation, because the control of the system is very powerful and seriously limits the chances for creating different ways of being and lifestyles.

Hypothesis: The relations of the citizens with society are regressive and narcissistic. People identify with the ideals of society by integrating them in the ideal of the Ego, which creates illusions of self-perfection that protect them from the anxieties and problems of collective life. This identification is reinforced by fantasies that define society as an unlimitedly abundant and generous womb. In its motherly function, society considers the illusion of being able to satisfy the various narcissistic whims of pleasure and enjoyment that the citizens have. Within that symbolism, these can be extremely voracious by means of consumerism. However, society also has a parental function that demands merit and responsibility to get to hedonism. For this, individuals have to get in touch and face problems and challenges imposed by reality so as to deserve the motherly generosity of society and not be excluded from it. Individuals are aware of the submission they have with society and the way this causes them annoyance. They also know the subjugation by the ideals of society means an obedient and obliging self takes the control of their lives. This means that people leave in the background all the authentic mental contents that are vital for the healthy and full development of the individuals. People unconsciously have the dilemma between the aspect of themselves they should emphasize, look after and express – the obliging or the authentic. The solution to this dilemma seems to lean towards the obliging and obedient self, because

in the submission to totalitarianism of society lies the expectation of inclusion in the system and the enjoyment of the hedonistic pleasure. On the other hand, choosing the vitality of the authentic self implies risks of exclusion from society, punishment and limited opportunities for enjoyment. The solution to this existential dilemma through the obedient and obliging self sheds light to understand the dehumanization and impotence discussed in the two sections above.

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