"Chile and the World at the Dawn of 2010"
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 peopleís 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 four interrelated themes:

1. **Work and pain**
2. **War and violence**
3. **Corrosion of family life projects: chaos and anxieties**
4. **Dehumanization**

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. Here the 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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Work and pain

Analysis: Participants of the Listening Post consider that working in Chilean society brings inexorably sorrow and suffering to the people. Working environments put pressure on individuals to show their ability to perform their roles and withstand with determination the demanding working days and workload without showing signs of weakness or complaining. People in their works have to testify loyalty and commitment with the organization. Workers are aware of showing a facade of stoical satisfaction

regarding the extreme demands of their work environments and they also tend to hide their emotions and experiences that may report vulnerability and uneasiness at work.

What is hidden, points mainly at the fear associated to job insecurity and lack of protection, especially fearing the usual disastrous effects of unemployment in personal lives. There is also the fear of precarious employment, lack of social equity between work and compensations, being part of a job with unstable contracts and losing the right to social protection. And let alone fear of the asymmetrical way in which the power is distributed throughout the organizations. This particularly so when business people and authorities concentrate the power to establish, unilaterally, severe labor conditions without considering the workers' thoughts and feelings. There is also concern regarding abuses and exploitations, raising voices against labor injustices and receiving punishments that may cause the worker's dismiss from the organization. People fear having to renounce to their individual dignity when, trying to reach security and stability, they submit themselves to the organizations' authoritarianism. Vulnerability of human condition at work, making any mistake and failing is frightening since it defers from the official statement of reaching the success as a leitmotiv.

Working nowadays in Chile implies that people have to face sorrow and suffering which undermines their psychological welfare and mental health, performance goals, insecurity, long working days, bad working relationships, etc. This poor environment penetrates, spreads and affects the worker's organism. Suffering and pains are somatized, which strengthens the feeling that the individual is at fault with the organization. The worker is then 'weak' not only emotionally but also physically. This fact creates a sense of guilt that takes the individual to establish a self-imposed discipline to correct the emotional and physical 'weaknesses' generated at work.

Work is a space established for pain but not for enjoyment or pleasure. People must go to work to produce and spend all their energy to then get back home to rest and recover their energy in order to make the continuous productivity cycle possible. The observance to the mental and physical discipline at work is a key factor to survive. Individuals create strategies to protect and keep themselves safe from the organizational punishment, especially the one of losing their jobs and living a period of unemployment.

Hypothesis: Sorrow and suffering at work reflect the objective conditions of insecurity, labor intensification, lack of social protection, excesses and exploitation, which undermines the psychological and health welfare of the individuals working for Chilean organizations. On the other hand, and unconsciously, there are organizational dynamics that normalize and trivialize people's sorrow and suffering. The experience of uneasiness is understood as a 'natural' process within the work life in Chile, where productivity and efficiency are highly considered. Normalization of sorrow and suffering also implies that uneasiness are mainly of an individual kind, so it is the worker himself the one who has to correct his weaknesses and failures. Besides, it considers a severe disciplinary control of both mind and body, so individuals have to adjust themselves to the organizational duties to avoid punishment and suffering. The upset with the organizational standards is inevitable so individuals tend to dissociate their bad experiences and profoundly idealize aspects that provide gratifications. Within the daily organizational life, this forces the individual to look for different strategies to keep an identity of 'perfect collaborator' in order to be protected against disciplinary measures. Paradoxically, the 'perfect collaboration' causes unease among the individuals.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

War and violence

Analysis: There is a concern for the strong predisposition towards aggressiveness and violence in the Chilean society. Besides, people tend very little to use creativity as a tool to solve conflicts and to express affection. There is distress within the Listening Post due to the destructive effect of aggressiveness in our society.

It is considered that media has a huge responsibility in the violence embraced by the citizens. Television has a tremendous power to gather and captivate audiences with programs about violence in Chile and the rest of the world. Armed conflicts and violence shown are of great interest to people. Viewers have a morbid interest in knowing the human sorrows in a virtual manner and in seeing how others must cope with misfortunes, disasters and pain from the comfortable point of view of a distant and uncommitted spectator. Violence in television is a mass consumption product, deliberately created and produced for masses to nourish and enjoy aggression and sorrow. By doing this, people fill their minds with dramatic thoughts, attitudes, and emotions that provide deep psychic compensations.

There is surprise within the Listening Post when realizing that violence in television is taken by the viewers with sadistic morbidity and that the observation of other people's sorrow allows them to tell with joy that there are others who undergo worst tragedies that have no comparison with their lives. The experience of the remote and substitute suffering is of great relief for the audiences since people get to the conclusion that 'after all, life's not that bad!!!', especially when taking as a comparison other people's drama shown in television, which in general are devastating. On the other hand, it is also considered that violence in television generates enjoyment since it allows people to experience their non-expressed aggressiveness and violence so they can identify themselves with the violent content in order to use it as an exhaust valve for the angers accumulated in the daily life and blocked due to the social control that censures to express them publically.

Some of the Listening Post participants opt for shutting themselves away in religion since there they find a shelter that connects them with God and allow them to develop their lives in this world. Others feel that violence is embedded in our society and accept it with resignation. The sense of embracing individualistic attitudes to confront violence in society is discussed and also up to what extent it is nonsense. It is set out that what's real important is to take collective measures and consider the big picture to effectively face violence in social relationships.

Hypothesis: The reflection around aggression and violence considers their origin in the society itself and that there are powers articulating pro-war speeches that penetrate with outstanding efficiency people's mind. People feel trapped in circuits of violence that are very complex to break since deeply this circuits offer an unconscious satisfaction of primitive and violent knots that every individual has. Projecting violence out of them — in television, politics or war — liberates individuals from the anxiety of recognizing that they also feel aggression, which unconsciously is developed and expressed in the dynamics of society. It is really complex to integrate violence and love, as expressed by the Listening Post participants, since people fall unconsciously in the idealization of internal objects that prevent the recognition and assimilation of our own aggressive impulses. People are open to perceive violent states of mind in others but

hardly in themselves. According to this mentality, it is impossible to link the ideas of love and creativity to solve conflicts.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Corrosion of family life projects: chaos and anxieties

Analysis: The reflection turns out to be how people in Chile become nowadays vulnerable and disqualified in their ability to plan and carry out family life projects in the medium and long-term. The current living conditions, with their ups and downs, uncertainties and crisis of all kinds, make people to lose control over their future, their families and expectations. Life plans are exposed to frequent interruptions or collapses, which generates anxieties and psychic, economical and social disturbances.

The current society is responsible for the lack of control to plan and put in order life according to the purposes desired. The strong orientation towards work, considering the demanding and intense working days, leave little time or energy to plan or carry out plans that contribute to the quality of life and welfare of couples and children. Values pertaining to neoliberalism — competition, market, consumption, materialism and individualism — rule and spur people's behavior in our society. These values are oppressive and neutralize individuals' ability to think and decide what they really want to be and do. Neoliberalism supposes a totalitarian cultural power that builds up citizens' identity, forcing them to develop a physical and mental performance discipline. The ways of enjoyment are clearly formulated; they are associated to money, having an employment, having access to consumption and an individual property. It is very difficult to get rid of these patterns, find scenarios for other options different from neoliberalism and withstand the contradictions and conflicts regarding the adoption of non-conventional identities. Competition, progress and success occur mainly in terms of material things so it is risky to opt for alternative life styles. Women tend to symbolize and personify alternative styles and different values but when trying to declare these ideals, especially at work, they are censured and punished. There are some risks when trying to establish new way for social relations.

This reflection takes us to the question of what do we do with our life to be part of a neoliberal society that doesn't give a respite to express ourselves? People are trained to obey behavior patterns established by the neoliberal system. Materialism is addictive; people need possessions to realize they are somebody within the system. This addiction is clear in adults since they feel responsible of training the new generations so they can take materialism as their leitmotiv.

Regarding this, there is the hope that things are changing, that there are people who resist the 'have to' as their orientation and opt for being themselves and face the dilemmas of life.

The group reflects about the fantasies regarding family projects, especially considering the tensions and ruptures of couples and marriages, where human relations are ephemeral, short and driven by the appearances, the instant pleasure and the lack of tolerance regarding disagreements. In conclusion, it is considered that weakness in the ability of creating family plans has to do with people's little capacity to accept their own human vulnerability and the lack of solidarity.

Hypothesis: People feel downhearted due to the lack of control of their lives, particularly regarding their incapacity to fulfill their hopes towards an individual and family welfare. There are anxieties created due to the lack of hope when realizing that the effort, perseverance, will and motivation to accomplish goals may be worthless when facing the fanciful powers of neoliberalism that undermines people's hopes and efforts. Neoliberalism is a huge force that traps people's mind and body in an inconsistent obedience that pressures values related to individualism, work, materialism and consumption. Considering alternatives to neoliberalism, individually and in groups, generates anxieties difficult to overcome and turn into constructive actions. When facing neoliberalism with innovative proposals, all the values, thoughts and behaviors are violently resisted. Life project failures surprise people in their human vulnerability and this immobilizes the supportive capacity among people to collaborate in order to solve their afflictions.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

Dehumanization

Analysis: This issue matches the first reflection made by the Listening Post in terms of the suffering linked to having a job in Chile. Participants consider that there is a common opinion of indifference regarding dehumanization in work life. The lack of consciousness and clarity to understand relationships at work, like the long working days, how monotonous and intensive jobs affect the physical and mental health and the quality of life in this society are issues of concern. People's responsibility regarding dehumanization and the lack of efforts to stop it is clear. This facts raises the question of what is inhuman and what is the limit between good and bad, being pointed out that the lack of values generates violent actions which finally dehumanize. Particularly, it is observed how young people are unemployed or have very precarious jobs.

There is a feeling of being trapped in dehumanization at work from which it is very difficult to escape. Only minorities in Chile can chose quality jobs which are actually satisfactory. Individuals with college education and certain professions very attractive to the market are the ones who enjoy privileges. They are the elite that access to works distinguished by the benefits they offer. Most of the people cannot chose and must only accept the jobs offered and adapt themselves to the conditions imposed. Choosing a job in Chile is a luxury! This is an absolute reality in the country.

What is inhuman and dehumanization places people in misery as a consequence of abuses and exploitations generated in work environments. Once again the group depicts the appellative of becoming aware of dehumanization, to do something, to share, to be supportive and to be willing to sacrifice oneself in order to change everything that already exists. It is necessary to struggle and find ways to deliver tools to end up with dehumanization. These must not be welfare measures. The real goal is to create a critical thinking and autonomy for a socially coordinated action.

Hypothesis: Dehumanization consciousness brings uneasiness and anxieties within the Listening Post participants. The reflection on this topic confirms how in Chile people work under very poor conditions, where the entrepreneurial power allows abuses and exploitations putting people under life conditions of vulnerability. Dehumanization traps since it is perceived as an overwhelming force that does not give any chance to free or change things. Reflection generates depression within the group and this feeling leads to consciousness and responsibility for what is happening. Depression also gives some certainty that it is possible to carry out measures that will eventually be socially

created. The group in general believes that it is possible to make reparations regarding injustices but hesitates on the exercise of power to change the order of things which allow dehumanization.

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