"Chile and the World at the Dawn of 2012"
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 lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 1. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOUR THEMES

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

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

Citizens' awareness and fear of social change

Analysis: For Chile, 2011 was a year jolted by massive social movements channelling the citizen's opposition to and discomfort with the neo-liberal model so strongly entrenched in society. As never before, and comparable only to demonstrations during the Pinochet dictatorship, the country experienced a concerted reaction convening large sectors of the population protesting against the Government and entrepreneurial decision to install hydroelectric power plants in Chilean Patagonia — which would bring about the destruction of natural environments and a deterioration of the quality of life in communities. The defrauds and swindles incurred into by retail entrepreneurs also unleashed the anger among citizens with the disclosure of obscure financial manoeuvres by executives aimed at taking advantage of middle-and low-income customers' indebtedness. More recently, a moral rejection came about against discriminatory classist abuse to low-income women working as servants for wealthy families. However, the most extraordinary event that took place was the strike by secondary and university students, who for seven months, unremittingly, demanded that the quality of public

education be improved, be free of charge, and to end considering education as a business, thus legitimizing profit.

All these protests, strikes and discomfort were an expression of the weariness felt by the majority of society with the perversions of neo-liberalism which, without any limit, views everything under the business prism, searching for profitability to fill the pockets of local and foreign entrepreneurs. In this scenario, the citizens deemed that political institutionalism, the Government, political parties and parliamentarians have become obsolete, due to the schism that separates them from the real needs and aspirations of the great majority of citizens.

Protests and demonstrations foreshadow the need for a radical change in Chilean society, as discomfort and abuse have reached an intolerable limit. The state of indignation reached is such that it compels towards a revolutionary shift in the Chilean neo-liberal system. Student protests, in particular, were an 'electro shock' that lurched the numbness out of people's conscience. This relief brought about a consensus regarding a need for change; however, such project results paralyzing due to the fear of disturbances, chaos and violence they involve. The violence and destruction resulting from student protests, particularly in the capital city of Santiago, are not easy to reconcile with the conviction of the need for social change. The risk of change bringing about violence and chaos causes deep resistance to undertake actions to free Chilean society from neo-liberalism and its ills. In the end, the citizens are dominated by a spirit of submission to the neoliberal regime, notwithstanding the fact that people declare having a powerful impetus to attain emancipation.

Hypothesis: The revolutionary motivations that social demonstrations stir in the citizens evidence that there also underlies an agglomeration of conservative forces underpinning maintenance of the status quo. The core of these conservative forces is rooted in the fear of disturbances, violence and repression, all of which evoke the tragic experiences of the Pinochet military dictatorship, which for a very long time disciplined the people with terrorism by the State. To materialize changing the neoliberal regime it is essential that there is the social confidence that will allow building credibility in a project that will transform society. The lack of leaders and reliable institutions makes social change appear as a leap into the void that causes very much anxiety. Renovation proposals may easily derive in betrayals, when backs are turned to the interests of the people. In this way of thinking there is a rationalization that prevents people from realizing that confidence in change is the responsibility of each individual's actions, where it is inevitable that together with achievements there will be disappointments and frustrations. Similarly, past traumas constitute a justification for not creatively addressing the need for changes that today are felt as essential. Collective rationalizations are powerful explanations to stay on in conservatism.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Citizens' disinterest — how to get from momentary
euphoria to actual commitment to social problems

Analysis: Current Chilean society is characterized by the prevalence of a manic-depressive mental state, which implies a great difficulty to recognize reality and work with perseverance and discipline toward solving the problems that ail it. Proof of this are solidarity events massively engineered to get resources for a certain cause, but later fade into oblivion due to lack of commitment and half-heartedness. It is necessary to find and consolidate in the people a more balanced stance against such polar behaviour

of excitement followed by disinterest, an outlook that will allow facing reality with all its features of chiaroscuro, tensions, contradictions and conflicts.

In society there is the dormant challenge to find the way to generate more democracy, to allow a respectful and constructive encounter between very different social sectors, between the rich and the poor, between the marginalized and the integrated sectors, between Chileans and immigrants. This requires that people overcome the inclination to remain apathetic, centred on self-interest, being indifferent to others, and instead, to take others into consideration, understand them, and to establish a community. Apathy and lack of interest for others are very marked in Chile at present; underlying the lack of human sensitivity there is a great fear of conflict — if one acknowledges the other individuals, there is the risk of becoming aware of the conflict, of the differences, and this may force one to take a stance and decisive actions. Apathy hides the hopelessness of being convinced that there are no possibilities for doing good, because, in the long run, the interests of the powerful always dominate — those of the crooks, of the deceptive, who manage to get the greatest benefits according to their interests.

Apathy is particularly evident in the world of labour, where neo-liberalism has highlighted the power of individualism for overcoming the problems of human existence. There are no trade unions, and if there are any, workers are too afraid to join them and support their actions. If there is a job action, if people join unions, if they defend their interests, they are punished, repressed, thrown out of their jobs, all of which generates great fear.

There is no lack of interest among the citizens to participate actively in society, to think and act to solve problems, but the centres of power have a very efficient fear management that weakens and immobilizes emancipating initiatives, particularly at the workplace, which is the heart of human life preservation. The fear is great, because the threat of losing your job, to be unemployed, is emotionally very destabilizing.

However, vis-à-vis this apocalyptic facet of life, there is also another reality in Chile that corresponds to social sectors who identify with an anti system identity, who fight for their interests upholding the solidarity to their peers. For them, information technology is vital to start and maintain contact networks and to coordinate actions.

Hypothesis: There is a predominant common feeling in society that apathy, disinterest and indifference to social events, problems and relationships with others, are the result of powerful anonymous forces which are very difficult to resist and modify. In the face of these monumental forces, the only appropriate thing is the action of individuals, looking after their own interests, disregarding all others. Apathy, conceived as socially induced and unchangeable, camouflages the selfishness ingrained in every individual. Thus, apathy gives carte blanche for individuals to focus the raison d'être in that which is strictly idiosyncratic. Underlying this dynamics is the neoliberal system's manipulative action that impels toward extreme individualism and competition between individuals. It is difficult for people to attain a notion that will reconcile the satisfaction of a reasonable individual narcissism with the needs of the *'socialism' implied* by life in a society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Opportunities provided by awakening

Analysis: The demonstrations in 2011 also resulted in putting people in a state of arousal that enables a re-encounter with ideals, utopias, energies and powers that seemed extinct due to the hegemonic control of neo-liberal culture. This awakening is the birth of a fraternal and protected environment that will allow a type of coexistence to meet the challenges of a better world which it is known will come about. It is the return to ideals of equity and solidarity that only in recent centuries humanity has succeeded in moving towards its consummation. From time immemorial, primitive man was dominated by instincts; today, it becomes possible to achieve progress in human development, and an improvement in our culture in order to have better people and a better quality of life.

Undoubtedly, there are societies that are more decent than others, where the conditions for human development are effectively created and protected. Chile is a case of advances and setbacks, no great advances have been achieved, although subsequent to the dictatorship there was a very significant progress.

In Chile, the awakening is expressed in the joy conveyed by folk music, in the efforts made to overcome the traumas of dictatorial repression — as there has also been an awakening to exploitation — and in the fight to eliminate the deep economic inequalities between the wealthiest and the great mass of citizens.

The return to Chile's ancestral identity is a sentiment of spirituality that may allow this awakening to be sustainable. The cultures of Chile's indigenous peoples provide cosmic views of man, nature and life that contain teachings of how to face today's world. Likewise, the nature in Chile invites you to find your identity in it, to coexist with the environment, respecting, protecting and renewing environmental resources. It is possible to establish a new formula for human development, different to that of neo-liberalism, a formula that will take into account new productive relationships with nature and establish alliances among Latin American peoples aimed at a mutual cooperation for the common welfare.

Hypothesis: The awakening that people speak about refers to a mental state of collective idealization to cope with the hard vicissitudes of life in today's Chile. It consists in thinking with an exaggerated sense of optimism that involves all citizens alike; there is a spiritual mystique of transcendence in preparation for building a new world that will be more just and satisfying. Idealization implies a mental placebo to temporarily relieve the discomforts of everyday life. This placebo would allow lubricating the physical, psychological and spiritual energies demanded daily by neo-liberalism. Having people filled with moral optimism guarantees productivity and effectiveness. The problem with idealization is that it leaves unresolved the issue of how to link widespread optimism, ideals and utopias, with addressing the many problems existing in Chile, in an effective, individual and collective way.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

Social networks and communication
technologies: Dilemmas as to their scope

Analysis: Facebook, twitter and the digital world are portrayed as central resources in the massive dissemination and impact of social movements experienced by the country during the year 2011. Accordingly, these means are perceived as very important agents in the scope of communications with respect to social transformation processes. A great hope arose vis-à-vis the higher capacity available to human beings to use communication

means that allow summoning others for the creation of new contents, as well as the possibilities offered by such means as denunciation vehicles of injustice realities, and of the profound asymmetries in power and economic resources existing in the country. However, there is also a deep distrust of social networks and the perception that they are sources of evasion and of disconnecting from contact with others. The threat of addiction to technology arises jointly with the statement that the group does not idealize its hopes in communication media, but rather, it strengthens its belief in the possibilities it provides.

For the group, the question remains of how can it possibly take charge of the possibilities offered by these means of communication, in the sense of verifying the existence of an excess of information. Participants wonder how is it possible to take charge of the possibilities and contradictions in society, and to take courses of action to implement changes.

Hypothesis: The ambivalence present in the group as regards the scope, possibilities and limitations offered by social networks and technological advances in the sphere of communications, is a reflection of how people and groups face their encounter with something new. On the one hand, there is a generational clash that encourages a strong distrust regarding the implications of communicating through these means. The addictive nature represents the most pathological extreme which is portrayed by those who lose themselves in these means. On the opposite extreme is the fear of idealizing these communication platforms, which undoubtedly have a convening power that has transformed social relations and the way to connect with others. For the group, the dilemma is how to integrate the technological sphere's speed of change and being able to engage constructively with the possibilities it offers. The question of how to take charge shows the precariousness of the individual in a digital world that exceeds by far the capacity to take a subjective stance that will not be lost in the mass of information and of the existing possibilities. In this context, the addict trapped in social networks emerges as a latent threat to the known means of communication, which at least offer a known and less intimidating path.

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