

24. Germán López

Well, I was, I was a representative at a polling station, a representative for the Yes side at the FISA, the International Exhibition Center of Cerrillos, which was a large venue for industry expos. I woke up very early to meet with the people from Maipú who were going to be representatives. There was an organized atmosphere in all the polling stations because I visited other stations, but as I said, I went to bed and woke up early to register at the venue, and from there we went to the polling stations. We were all civilians, professionals, students, civilians, and we arrived at the polling station. We were assigned the tables, and by the way, I was not an employee of any state organization or anything like that. I was an independent student studying at the University of Santiago. So, I came to that place voluntarily, and well, we stayed there the whole day. Well, the first sign was when the vote counting began, which was not a concern in Cerrillos because we knew that these areas, middle and lower-income sectors, were mostly pro-No. We said that in other municipalities, especially in certain areas [illegible], we could reverse the situation.

Well, after that, I actually went straight to my girlfriend's house to wait for the official results. They came out late. Let's remember that it's often caricatured with the Minister, the Deputy Interior Minister, Cardenil, Ernesto Cardenil, who gave the results very late, trying to... there were comments, and that night Radio Cooperativa, which I was listening to, tried to always listen to both sides. The official voice of the No side that night, especially, was Radio Cooperativa. Therefore, you would see the official voice on television, the state channel, and listen to Radio Cooperativa, which was the pro-No radio station. So, Radio Cooperativa had a system that clearly declared the No side as the winner. But both sides had demonized each other during the campaign of the Yes and No. Those on one side said the others were lying, and those on the other side said the opposite. So, one tried to figure out who was saying what that night, which is why I listened to both sides saying they were the winners. There was tension, and there were two famous journalists on the radio, on Radio Cooperativa, Campos and a high-pitched female journalist named Manuela Robles. So, I listened to Campos and Manuela Robles on the radio, and I would get up to watch the television. I was eager that night to see everything that was happening.

Well, definitely something that happened that night, in an independent channel, I think it was the channel of the Catholic University, there was an interview with General Matthei entering La Moneda, where he said that the victory of the No side was unquestionable. It is often said that he was the one who prevented the self-coup to disregard the results. But I knew that if the result had been negative, positive for Pinochet's option or for what we agreed with him, it would have been respected, regardless of the outcome. Well, that night I kept listening until the final official count from Cardenil, where the No side won clearly, and I felt very sad because, in addition to being tired and exhausted from waking up very early that day. So, and also, being focused on the radio and concerned about the plebiscite.

I always remember that day of the plebiscite, I had the role of being a representative for both the Yes and the No sides. There was a neighbor from my neighborhood who was a Christian Democrat from the Christian Democratic Party, which I knew, but we didn't know each other personally. Well, we talked, trying to ensure that nothing went wrong. We reached an agreement with a person, that there were no problems. We tried to say, well, there was no need to argue about that vote because it was clearly for the Yes side. The person marked the option clearly. So, that day I was with this gentleman, who was a close neighbor of mine, and well, those were special situations because everywhere you looked, there

was someone next to you who was for Yes or No. The country was divided, as I said. The country, indeed. There was one half that was in favor of the Yes option, and there was another, slightly larger majority, that was in favor of the No side. It wasn't something that could be said, "This was overwhelmingly in favor of the No side," or "The people working in the state apparatus were in favor of the No side." So, you found yourself in a situation like the one I encountered during the election. I met this neighbor from across the street at the same table. He was for the No option, and I was for the Yes option. We talked, and he didn't recognize me. I told him, "I know you. You live in such a place, you're the father of so-and-so," because I knew his son. He said, "Oh, yes," and we had a conversation. Well, we talked because we spent the whole day together because these elections last the entire day. You have to arrive first to set up the table, to establish the table. And I arrived and spent the whole day with this gentleman. So, in the end, we were able to have a good conversation. In the afternoon, let's say, we reached a reasonable agreement. Why would we start arguing? You be reasonable with the No votes, and I'll be reasonable with the No votes.

Well, they had this confidence that they would win. That's what everyone was saying there. The difference was that they thought they would win by a much larger margin. And the truth is that Pinochet, the Yes side, got 43 percent. They thought they would win 70 percent, something like that, but they ended up with 52-53 percent. There was a difference there with people who voted null or blank. But that situation of encountering someone so close to you was a special situation. Because I knew, you know, but it just happened that at the table, I ended up with someone I knew right next to me.

Well, I spent the whole day, I arrived very tired and listened, while listening to the radio, the radio. That night, I went to my girlfriend's house, and there was the television, the official voice, and Radio Cooperativa, which was the radio station because at that time the No option didn't have a TV channel. The only thing they had was the political slot, where the Yes and No campaigns were presented. So, there was Channel 13 that gave the official view, and there was Radio Cooperativa mainly. There were two radios, Radio Cooperativa and the other one was from the Archdiocese. I switched between the two radios and listened.

And that night, obviously in the neighborhoods, there were celebrations. But it was a more peaceful celebration. People didn't go out to celebrate in the streets, honking horns. I remember when the World Cup in South Africa came, and there were these vuvuzelas, and I heard them during the celebration at night, around one or two in the morning. I fell asleep, extremely tired from being at the voting location all day. And it was... it was very sad falling asleep that night. The thing is, at the age of 27, around 26, you take things with much more passion than you do now. So, it hurts a lot. The defeat hurts a lot. And that time, I felt very saddened. You see, I've had many defeats, politically and other victories, but none hurt me as much as that one because I had actively participated in that plebiscite, actively participated. I was a student. Therefore, on the day of the vote, one started to feel it. But despite everything, I was quite conservative in my prediction. Because I had heard and read a lot, and on those previous days, the people from the Yes side had a triumphalist attitude, a sense that the military had everything under control and that we would win anyway. And I said no because at the same polling location, I saw many foreign observers who had come to see how the voting was unfolding that day. It was tightly controlled. It was impossible to defraud. No, no, no, no, no, I said no, I don't see it as that easy. There's even the possibility of losing.

And I started doing the first vote counts at the table that day. I stood up because my table hadn't finished or hadn't started yet because the work of the representative is to oversee the table. But if someone wants to take a walk, I went to check the counts, and it was already negative for the Yes option. But it was a day of sorrow because it was a defeat. I would describe that day as going to bed feeling very, very saddened, deeply saddened for having lost because I believed that the Yes option was the best choice. It was only comparable to the recent election; I would have bet on it, and I felt it was important. Only with this election of Sebastián Piñera, I have experienced the two most important electoral moments for me, which were that day of the Yes and No plebiscite and the election that took place a month or two ago. I thought it was a path, a fork where one took a direction opposite to the...