

11. Patricio Malatesta García: Checked

I'm here today to talk about the plebiscite of 1988. At that time, I was twenty-seven years old. Before recounting my personal experience on that day, I want to focus on the concept of the plebiscite, how it came about, and how we reached that day. It wasn't because of street demonstrations or simply pressure from a group of people. No, there were significant milestones in the last forty years of our history that led to this. In the 1970s, a candidate supported by the left came to power as the president of the republic. Although our constitution from 1925 allowed for a candidate to become president with a relative majority, subsequently ratified by the congress, Salvador Allende became president with approximately 35 percent of the votes. Therefore, 65 percent of the population did not want him as president. However, the government began to function, and they came with the idea of a revolution inspired by the Cuban model but fundamentally based on the legality of coming to power democratically. But after three years of the government of the Popular Unity coalition, a military intervention took place in 1973, particularly on September 11th. This intervention was not a typical coup d'état where there is only a military takeover to change the administrative side of governance. Here, the military intervention changed the fundamental pillars of our society. Among those fundamental changes was the proposal to the citizens for a new constitution. A new constitution was prepared and voted on September 11th, 1980, and it was approved by a majority. In that constitution, I speak at length about the genesis of reaching the plebiscite. In its transitional articles, it was established that at the end of the presidential term from 1980 to 1988, the government junta would propose a candidate to continue governing the country. That proposal would be subjected to a plebiscite. That's all that the constitution of 1980 mentioned about the plebiscite. Thus, the articles came into effect on March 11th, 1980, and President Pinochet began to govern the country because the constitution itself stated that he would start governing on that date. It was established by law eight years prior that the government junta, consisting of the four commanders, the chief, and the general director, would propose a candidate to the citizens to continue the presidency of the country. If approved, the candidate would continue to govern for another eight years, and this new president would call for elections since until that date, we didn't have senators or deputies. If the plebiscite was rejected or if the No option won by a majority, the president would remain in office for one more year, and presidential elections would be called for 1989. Well, that's the genesis of the plebiscite, and that's how the years from 1980 to 1988 unfolded.

In my personal case, I studied business administration during that period. I started working in banking, and by the time between 1980-1988, the economy had experienced a significant crisis between 1982, 1983, and 1984. Eventually, we began to recover reasonably well after high unemployment rates, business bankruptcies, and difficulties in the banking sector. By 1986, there was a lot of university and street unrest. Those who didn't want the military government to continue expressed their opposition through protests. During that period, weapons were smuggled in clandestinely, and those same weapons were used in the 1986 attack on the president, resulting in the death of several of his bodyguards. After that incident, I would say that General Pinochet's chances of being reelected increased because the economy improved, and his internal image was also strengthened after the attack.

We arrived at the year 1988, and the government junta convened and finally proposed General Pinochet as the candidate to be plebiscited. The people had to be asked whether they agreed or not. Along with this, in order to ensure maximum transparency in the electoral process, an electoral campaign was approved, which became widely known because people had to choose whether to continue with what

we had or not. As I mentioned earlier, General Pinochet would continue governing for one more year, and then general elections would take place. Electoral registers were also created because until that year, I don't know if it was 1985 or 1986, there were no electoral registers. They had been eliminated, and they were created precisely to ensure that there was no manipulation in the election.

About a month before October, the electoral campaign began, and in my opinion, before the campaign, it was most likely that General Pinochet would be reelected. However, the No campaign gave many people the belief that they could remove him from power, that they could vote No. On the other hand, many people who agreed with the progress that the country had made since 1973, the advancements and future development, agreed to continue with the model but not with the person, not with General Pinochet leading the government for eight more years. And so, the campaign started, and I truly believe that the No campaign was fundamental in the final decision because it was very creative, joyful, and perhaps it managed to mobilize people who individually may not have had much interest in participating. Perhaps they didn't believe it was possible, and I think the No campaign had great value in that. Looking back now, I think the Yes campaign was very flat, it was almost like a fear campaign, as if not approving the Yes option would bring the horrors of hell. The truth is that the country was already mature enough to be governed by civilians and not by military caution.

So, ultimately, the day of October 5th arrived, and I went to vote very early in the morning. The polling stations opened, I think, at 8 a.m. I had to vote at Parque Arauco, a parking lot that no longer exists today, but at that time, the voting booth was set up in the Parque Arauco parking lot, and it was crowded. That day, people poured into the streets to vote, for one option or the other, and it was carried out throughout the day in complete normalcy. There was easy access, no disorder. It was truly a civic day of great cultural significance. The first polling stations, I think, closed at 6 p.m. because the closing time was not mandatory like it is now. At that time, they had to remain open for nine hours, so some polling stations were set up later and closed later. The first vote counts came out, and those initial counts, maybe with around ten percent of the polling stations, gave a slight advantage to the Yes option. And in the news, opposition politicians began to express their surprise because the people from their commands distributed throughout the country were reporting the opposite. Well, the vote counts were further delayed. It was around 9 p.m., and we still only had about twenty percent of the votes counted. I don't remember exactly, but the percentage of polling stations counted was very low, and the Yes option was still leading, but with a significantly reduced advantage until General Matthei, who was one of the members of the government junta, appeared on television stating that he had information and that the No option had won the plebiscite. That truthfully relieved the tension a bit, and the results quickly started to appear, and ultimately, I believe that by midnight, it was acknowledged that the No option had won.

And that day, I would say that I watched various political programs on television until late, very late. Personally, I was surprised because I believed that the Yes option would win. That was my perception at that moment. Also, if the Yes option had won, it would have been a similar outcome, maybe with a difference of only five percent or even less. Well, ultimately, the No option won. The next day, I went to work like any other day. I worked in downtown Santiago. Therefore, in the morning, it wasn't as noticeable, but when leaving work, there was a spontaneous march along Alameda Avenue. The flags of the No option were raised, many people were happy, embracing the police officers (carabineros), and there was certainly a lot of joy among the victorious supporters. In my case, I lost, so I didn't have much joy, but I also didn't think it was the end of the world. It was simply a change of government, a change

that, in essence, stemmed from what happened in 1973 when democracy was broken, and subsequently, a constitution was established that included a plebiscite as the final step to return to normality. Therefore, it was a process that was bound to happen, except that I would have preferred the Yes option to win and General Pinochet to govern for another eight years. But it didn't happen. General Pinochet continued to govern for one more year after that day, and then general elections were called, resulting in the elected President Patricio Aylwin. In the year following the plebiscite, which occurred due to the negative outcome or victory of the No option, many reforms were made to the constitution. There was a second plebiscite in 1989, which people hardly remember, in which a series of amendments were made to the constitution that those who won considered authoritarian. With that change, the length of the first presidential term was temporarily reduced from eight to four years. Well, after that, democracy truly began on March 11, 1990.