

Chile in Ruins¹: A Letter from Carina Vaca Zeller

Translator Iris Curteis

On the 27th March upon Rudolf Steiner's 149th birthday, the middle and south of Chile were struck by an earthquake 8.8 Richter scale at approximately 3.34 am, the earthquake was followed by a tsunami. Historically this is the seventh strongest earthquake on record. In comparison, the Haiti earthquake registered 7.3 Richter scale. The greatest quake ever to be measured was also in Chile, in 1960 in Valdivia at 9.5 Richter scale. According to NASA the force of the quake shifted the earth axis by 8 centimetres, which apparently affected length of day-to-night ratio. The quake of September 2009 in Sumatra measured 7.6; the effects of the March earthquake in Chile are expected to have a greater impact on the planet as the epicentre, Concepción, is not as close to the equator [translators note: therefore closer to the poles].

The Chilean government has reacted rapidly with bi-partisan support from both the out-going President Bachelet and the incoming President Piñera; despite vast political differences everyone is working together.

Everywhere one looks one sees grief. No one yet knows how many people have died. The official numbers are 804 dead, 1000 missing, 2 million injured. A mother finding her three dead children in the rubble, or 8 people who survived by climbing a tree before the tsunami hit the island of Orrego and swept away 300 lives. These are just examples for all the deep human grief and suffering one sees everywhere. On the island of Juan Fernandez, a twelve year old girl woken by the earthquake and looked out of her window, she saw the boats out to sea being tossed against each other. The girl ran to the village square and rang the gong alarming the people to the coming tsunami; church bells were rung by others and people could flee in time. The girl's actions saved 700 people only moments before the devastating tsunami struck.

Chile has so far been one of the most modern and affluent nations in South America. Although the tragedy taking place in Haiti shattered us all, it is very different when we experience such things ourselves. A friend of mine thought it was remarkable that nearly the whole of Chile was experiencing the same thing [the quake] at the same time.

It is very moving to experience the solidarity that has arisen among the vast majority of Chileans. Those less affected help their neighbours. There are many fundraising events/initiatives taking place and 16 000 young people have voluntarily mobilised to help. Significant aid is coming from around the world, but the sheer size of the devastation and grief makes everything look insignificant. In the face of such catastrophic events one begins to feel how a consciousness of deepest compassion spreads across a country, across the whole world. such takes place either through conscious will activity or it is brought about by great suffering.

As in all threshold situation the reality encompassed both. It is also heart-wrenching to see some people arrive with trucks/lorries and, while families search for their loved one among the rubble, loot television sets, refrigerators and so on. Shops are plundered, not just for food, but for computers and electrical appliances so that thousands of soldiers are occupied with patrolling the streets [against looters] in the worst effected areas and curfews have been imposed in coastal regions.

Two noteworthy natural phenomena that took place: on the night of the quake there was a full moon; its light was glaringly bright, much brighter than ever before. The other—we have

¹ I have translated this letter in some haste; the translation isn't word perfect but I think accurate as such.

experience with earthquakes here—dogs always bark and howl before a quake, roosters crow and animals flee to higher ground before a tsunami. None of these things happened this time. The animals were silent and only fled when the quake started.

A depressed, desperate and laming mood generically lies over this country—one can only, with great difficulty, carry such immense pain inwardly. As Anthroposophical movement we want to actively help. Our movement has many young people who are willing to help with hearts and hands ... otherwise it would nearly become impossible to go on living. At Easter (2, 3, 4 April) we will go to one/some of the stricken communities in which young people are already helping to build/rebuild houses, source beds and bedding among many other things. Medical students, anthroposophical doctors, therapists, Waldorf teachers etc will take part in this help-action. Help will not only be of the material kind, but we want to bring the holistic element of Waldorf-pedagogy and anthroposophical medicine to these people.

We need your generous help now. Please donate to the following account:

<http://www.shelertochile.blogspot.com/>

the account was opened by the medical section Dornach for Latin America, in Chile the action will be carried by the not-for-profit Anthroposophical Institution (Corporación Terapéutica Yohanan therapeutes) we will also post a *blog* in *The Goetheanum* with addresses and updates so you can follow our action.

Chile has always has courageous and self-sacrificing people; nothing is ever easy or self-evident, matter-of-fact, and yet again we face and must withstand a hard soul-trial. We need strength, the human care and compassion we experience from the world helps greatly ... we must upon destruction build anew ... so once more we must say *Fuerza Chile!* [literal translation: Strength Chile]

Carina Vaca Zeller