

CONVERGING ACTIVISMS IN THE “NO MÁS AFP” MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This article explores an experience of converging activisms from the “No más AFP” movement, which demands the end of the current pension model in Chile, leading the public and daily debate.

I argue that the outcome of the July 24, 2016 demonstration (24J) of this movement was possible when the primary, traditional type of activism in the movement converged with online, citizen-driven activism, which used social media as the main tool for coordination.

I discuss some features of the convergence of these activisms from a qualitative perspective, revealing challenges and learnings gained from this case, exposing a piece of this social movement that is normally eclipsed, which has significantly contributed to its widespread growth in Chilean society.

Keywords: activism, social media, protests, online participation, No más AFP, Chile

Artículo

ACTIVISMOS CONVERGENTES EN EL MOVIMIENTO "NO MÁS AFP"

Resumen

El artículo explora una experiencia de activismos convergentes en el movimiento "No más AFP", que busca poner fin al sistema de pensiones vigente en Chile, y que ha liderado el debate tanto público como cotidiano.

Sostengo que el resultado de la manifestación del 24 de julio de 2016 (24J) de este movimiento fue posible gracias a la convergencia entre el activismo primario y tradicional del movimiento, con un activismo online de carácter ciudadano, el cual utilizó las redes sociales como herramienta principal de coordinación.

Utilizando una perspectiva cualitativa, discuto ciertas características de la convergencia de estos activismos, revelando desafíos y aprendizajes adquiridos a partir de este caso particular, exponiendo así una parte menos conocida de este movimiento social, y que ha contribuido significativamente a su amplio crecimiento en la sociedad chilena.

Palabras clave: activismo, redes sociales, protestas, participación online, No más AFP, Chile

1. Introduction

2016 was a key year for the return of massive mobilisation in Chile. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered throughout the country to protest the current pension model under the slogan, “No más AFP,” in a scenario that resembled the 2011 Chilean wave of protest in terms of the number of participants during manifestations, adding diversity of participants.

Demanding the end of the present private model and proposing the implementation of a new pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) system, massive demonstrations filled the streets of many cities in the country on some Sunday mornings, with a variety of participants, placing the movement and the pension subject at the centre of the public debate, in the media, and everyday conversation.

This article aims to discuss some key features in the process of encountering a citizen-driven activism, related to the intensive use of technologies, social media, and the internet, combined with the main activism that was already developing within the movement, more related to trade unions, in the process of arranging the July 24, 2016, demonstration (24J), as the first national massive demonstration.

1.1. A brief history

In the late 1980s, during Pinochet’s military dictatorship, Chile was the first country to privatise its pension model, replacing the old PAYGO system, which was organised by occupational sectors, with a Defined Contributions (DC) type, where each person’s retirement is completely determined by that individual’s savings (Quintanilla, 2011).

The idea of this individual capitalisation model is that the worker must give 10 per cent of his income to one of the many available pension funds, known as “Administradora de Fondos de Pensiones” (Pension Fund Administrator, or AFP), whose purpose is to collect this money, invest, and grow it, charging a fee for this service.

This was one of several changes introduced in the country as part of the “experiment” of the neoliberal laboratory (Foxley, 1982) during the decade of the eighties, after the military coup d’état, moving towards a “social market economy.”, which is strongly privatised and in favour of the free market (Mayol, 2013).

From that point to the present, several critiques about the AFP model have arisen. Among them are: that after its implementation, the AFP became a mandatory model for all new workers; that it excludes workers from the police and armed forces, who maintain their own pension system; that the pensions assigned to retirees are very small, in comparison to the high profits earned by the AFPs; and the nexus with large economic groups, which makes it a central pillar of the neoliberal model (CENDA, 2010; Coordinadora NO+AFP, 2016; Gálvez & Kremerman, 2019, 2020b, 2020a; Mesina, 2017; Rivadeneira-Martínez, 2017; Solimano, 2017).

1.2. The emergence of the “No Más AFP” movement

As anticipated, a return of the “new dawn of social movements” (Grez, 2011) emerged in 2011, particularly from local mobilisations in the south of the country,¹ and of course, with the students’ movement massively claiming the end of for-profit education in Chile.

As part of this cycle, “No más AFP”² has massively emerged in 2016, with several demonstrations all over the country. This wave of protests the private pension model began with the July 24, 2016, national march, followed by two demonstrations in the same year (August 21 and October 13). Nonetheless, the origins of the movement can be traced from 2008, as a trade union response to safeguard workers’ pension savings because of the global financial crisis during that period. In 2013, these trade unions arranged an umbrella organisation, holding the claim mainly among workers' organisations.

The movement has created a rich social debate about the pension system, furthering the already existing critiques, and proposing a PAYGO tripartite model, with contributions from workers, the State, and employers. In terms of participation and promotion of the claim, citizens involved in the mobilisations enjoyed a high level of public support. This claim has been at the core of the latest mobilisations in the country, particularly in the 2019 Social Outburst.

1 There were two main social uprisings. One, in the Aysén region, against the construction of a hydroelectric power plant. The other was in the Magallanes region, against the rise in the price of natural gas.

2 Which can be translated as “No More Pension Fund Administrators”.

Since the critiques come from different angles, the movement has stressed an important value in the Chilean society, that is, neoliberalism, which operates as a “tentacular system” (Araujo & Martuccelli, 2012, p. 71)³ that infiltrates itself into economic, social, political, cultural, and moral dimensions of society.

Furthermore, “No más AFP” even managed to exceed the number of participants in the massive public demonstrations during the 2011 student movement, which is a substantial achievement, given that to date⁴, it was the latter that had convoked the largest demonstrations since the return of democracy (Segovia & Gamboa, 2012; Somma, 2012).

This can be seen among its mobilisations, which accomplished a series of milestones during 2016, in comparison to the previous year. Using as a reference the study, “Conflicto Social en Chile 2015-2016” (Garretón *et al.*, 2017), I emphasize the following:

- An important rise in the number of protests during 2016. In 2015, December saw the largest number of protests, with 17 in total. In 2016, the most active month was November, with 68 protests all around the country. In other words, the highest month in 2016 quadrupled the total of the most active month in 2015 for the “No más AFP” demonstrations.
- There is a wide diversity of participants in the demonstrations. In 2015, there were more workers, civil servants, and trade unionists related to the movement. But in 2016, there was a greater presence of younger and older people, political organisations, and groups of citizens under the label of the “Indignant.”⁵
- In addition, “No más AFP” protests gathered more participants in 2016 than all the rest of the claims added together during that year.

The previous data demonstrate features of the public demonstrations of this movement, and give some clues about their massiveness, both in the number of events and participants, as

³ Translated from the original in Spanish: “Sistema tentacular de cariz neoliberal”.

⁴ This number was later exceeded by feminist protests (2018) and mobilisations from the 2019 Social Outburst.

⁵ In Spanish: Indignados.

in the heterogeneous composition of the latter. This prompts a question: which processes facilitated the amplification of the movement?

I argue that this was possible due to the junction of the main routine of activism present since the foundation of the movement, born from the efforts of different trade unions, with a more citizen-driven form of activism, which rapidly emerged from the internet and social media. Conceptually, these routines are examined as two "activist cultures" (Juris & Pleyers, 2009; Pleyers, 2010, 2017) in the movement, as logics of action comprising normative orientations, practices, forms of organisations, ways of relating to the adversary, and conceptions about social change. Rather than providing a detailed analysis of each routine, I will focus on challenges and tensions to illustrate the convergence of these activisms.

This argument will be discussed using the 24J demonstration as an outcome of this intersection of paths of activisms. The rally was the first to demonstrate massive participation, estimated at 750 thousand participants (Cooperativa.cl, 2016). It is a milestone for the beginning of a profound critique of the current pension model.

Therefore, using seven selected milestones of the course of action of the march, I have identified some key features to discuss this junction of forms of activism. Relating to the notion of "sociologies of absences and emergences" (Sousa-Santos, 2006b, 2006a, 2010), I will show possible experiences within the "No más AFP" movement, in terms of expanding the horizon of possible logics and senses of their efforts of social emancipation, bringing to light a part of the movement that has not even been recognised until now.

Although not exhaustive, my formula is to expose this experience of bridging the two paths of activism, developing an analysis that can aid in better understanding the 24J demonstration as a fruitful outcome: not just in terms of massiveness, but also in the addition of heterogeneous participants and its effects in public support of the claim. Therefore, this analysis will obtain some knowledge about converging activism experiences, and to invite an expansion of this field.

2. Methods

The analysis presented here is based on 50 qualitative semi-structured interviews (Blee, 2013; Blee & Taylor, 2002) of movement activists, comprising both leaders and middle-range activists. It additionally includes participant observations at mobilisations (Almeida,

2020; Lichterman, 1998), as well as the 24J, conducted by the author between 2016 and 2017 in different cities in Chile. It also considers online participant observations (Mare, 2017; Postill & Pink, 2012) of news, conversations, and debates in several Facebook groups, where some activists in the movement congregated. Finally, material produced by activists and organisations within the movement (online and print), and coverage by the mass media (newspapers and television) was also reviewed.

3. Results

3.1. Why don't we march? The online call

The origins of the “No más AFP” movement can be traced to the creation of the called “Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores No Más AFP”⁶, an autonomous umbrella organisation composed of workers from different trade unions in the public and private arenas, which was formed in 2013.

In terms of demonstrations, the “Coordinadora” gathered about 10-15 thousand people in their best scenario⁷, when they started to use the “No más AFP” slogan for their songs and banners. Nonetheless, these numbers would increase enormously, once the citizens that were having discussions in Facebook groups arrived.

In 2016, some of these groups⁸ were actively engaging their members in online debate and sharing different outrageous situations, such as excesses from private companies, the privilege of politicians in the government, and cases of collusion between both. This facilitated an indignant mood among them. In addition to these scandals, there are several more upcoming ones that will likely contribute to the 2019 Social Outburst (Morales-Quiroga, 2020).

6 In English: National Coordinator of Workers No More Pension Funds Administrators. From now on, referred to as the “Coordinadora”.

7 As informed by one of the members of the “Coordinadora” (Interview conducted in September 2016, Santiago de Chile).

8 There were many groups, but the most popular was “Indignados de Chile”. Since then, the name of the group has been modified several times. The analysis focuses mostly on this group.

Suddenly, AFP rejection was gaining more relevance, particularly after the “jubilazo” news in early July 2016. The “jubilazo” scandal involved several gendarmerie workers, among them the ex-wife of the then President of the Chamber of Deputies⁹, who received wealthy pensions, unreachable for the average Chilean citizen. This occurred because specific arrangements were made, to give them advantageous conditions in their retirement.

Many suggestions rapidly emerged, calling for a national rally against the AFPs. For this purpose, members of these groups appropriated the “No más AFP” motto, to signal their rejection of the retirement model and to use it as a slogan in preparation for the march.

Thus far, few of these citizens knew about the existence of the “Coordinadora”, or even about the origins of the “No más AFP” motto, rather, it was a suggestion made by one of their members, nothing more. Nonetheless, this did not prevent them from fostering the claim and multiplying it via social media and networks, particularly on Facebook. After a long online discussion, a consensus was achieved. The date of the mobilization would be July 24, 2016, at 11 in the morning.

This first action demonstrates how a movement that had been operating for four years, surpassed its limitations when ordinary citizens approached them, and massively amplified the claim in a very short time, with the promise of a national march. Here, the purpose is not to dismiss the vital work already done by the “Coordinadora”, but to emphasise the power of these technologies to easily initiate a demand, quickly amplify it, and make it easily digestible to the population, which facilitates making it shareable.

Thus, virtual space becomes an effective platform for suggesting and coordinating collective action, from a group of “free” citizens, meaning free in the sense that the gathering occurred only through these Facebook groups, without knowing each other, at least face-to-face, and without a traditional social movement organization.

⁹ The woman is Myriam Olate. The politician is Osvaldo Andrade, a member of the Socialist Party.

3.2. Asking for permits and reinforcing social media.

After setting a specific date and time for the march, the next challenge was to ask for permits from the local authorities. The logical idea was to hold it in Santiago, the capital of the country because it would be easier to congregate a major amount of people¹⁰. As well, the country is highly centralized (Lochow & Bravo, 2016), which leads to the concentration of political and economic power in Santiago, while regional interests are misrepresented. As a result, a demonstration in the capital would have a bigger impact.

Thus, in the process of finding out how to ask for this permission, and shortly after the date and time of the march had been agreed upon, some volunteers from one of these Facebook groups decided to meet outside of the Metropolitan Intendencia¹¹ building, after learning that this was the place for submitting the rally request. This was an important event, since it allowed two women from the online group to meet each other for the first time face-to-face, going beyond the mediated communication and translating the demand into actual people, rather than simply an online presence.

After this first encounter, they had a brief meeting with some authorities about the purpose of the march, what kind of organisation they were, and to fill out a form as a requirement for the petition. Some days later, they received authorisation from the regional authorities.

Despite the beginnings of the organisation of the national march in Santiago, the door was not closed to replicating it in other cities in the country. Hence, the experience began to be shared in the Facebook group, explaining the steps to follow to ask for local permits. This rapidly turned into useful knowledge, demonstrating that the process was not difficult, and as a lesson, in terms of showing the ability of regular citizens to coordinate a public demonstration.

The experience became a milestone for many citizens in the Facebook group around the country, to start organizing themselves in their cities. Therefore, more local experiences were discussed, with members of the group sharing their successful experiences and

¹⁰ Around 40 percent of the country's population lives there.

¹¹ The name of the Administration Office/City Hall of the Metropolitan Region of Chile, where Santiago is located.

photographs of the official documents, showing the corresponding authorisations for several cities.

The idea here was to not wait for someone else, like a political party or formal organisation to manage the rally, and instead, to encourage themselves to take a central role in organising the demonstration. This was amplified when they started to use additional technology, WhatsApp, to reinforce the organisation of the march. This can be seen from the following extract of an interview:

During the month of July [of 2016], the webpage [Facebook group] was becoming a committee, an association. For example, AA [names one of the administrators of the Facebook group] who lives in Puerto Montt, began to call all people who were gathering on social networks. For example, someone posted a banner for the march in Iquique, then AA contacted him on Facebook and said to him: 'hey, if you are going to organise the rally there, I am going to add you to a WhatsApp group so we can coordinate together'. And that is how the work-group was forming [...] For example, there is another case in Concepción. A girl [asks on social media] 'how do I ask for the permit in the Intendencia?' And as we were the first that asked for it, I told her: 'you have to go to the Intendencia, you have to fill out a form, and you say it's the "No más AFP" march.' 'Ok, perfect' [answers the girl].¹²

3.3. What kind of march do we want? No flags, no political colours, bare-faced and family-oriented.

One of the main questions to be resolved before the march took place was: what kind of march do we want? With that in mind, lots of suggestions emerged in the online debate. The most prominent were as follows:

3.3.1. A demonstration without flags and political colours.

One of the main worries for these online citizens was to organise a massive event where there were no political parties involved at all. This was at the core of the call, with hypervigilance for potential members of this Facebook group, possibly being part of a political organisation that could reorient the march to their interests. This wariness was extended to all political

¹² Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

colours, no matter if they were from the left or the right. Everything with a political connotation was automatically forbidden and instructed to leave the future march and their organisation.

This revealed how far developed the idea of “political” was in a broad sense. For the group members, anything that could be seen as slightly political was spontaneously rejected, because it ran the risk of infecting the convocation, which was made by "common people", unrelated to any organisation that was pursuing power, money, or winning elections. On the contrary, this was deployed as a "pure call", so the responsibility was to keep it like that as long as possible. Beyond that, members started to call themselves “apoliticals,” creating the term in complete opposition to what they understood as political, which was related to a sense of formal political institutions.

3.3.2. A bare-faced march.

Another important concern was to go beyond the usual massive demonstrations, where the media generally focuses its broadcasts on the riots, people in hoods ("encapuchados") and the violence they implement, showing the destruction of public property. The idea here was to keep the focus on the “No más AFP” claim, avoiding as much as possible losing the direction and focus of the march.

Consequently, they proposed a call for a bare-faced march, preventing themselves a priori from being associated with a request for street riots, in the sense that nobody that would clearly show their face in a demonstration would get involved –at least easily- in throwing stones at the police, or destroying public goods in the streets, just to name some examples. Hence, it was a preventive tactic to minimise the possibility of protesters becoming negative rioters.

3.3.3. A family-oriented march.

This was proposed first, to draw massive numbers, to assure the participation of lots of people. Secondly, the desire to be a family-oriented march was to show their openness to all the public, where parents, grandparents, and children were kindly invited to take part in the demonstration. Thirdly, this sort of participant would assure that the march would take a “pacifist” nature, guaranteeing that with the presence of, for example, children and grandparents, the demonstration would not take a violent turn. Fourth, since the call was

made for a Sunday morning, this was a typical time for families to gather in their homes, so the idea was to move the scenario from the house to the streets.

This demonstrated an interesting feature of the convocation, attempting to fill the streets of the country with many participants, invoking the family in a very broad sense as a social actor. This was key because it went beyond the usual discourse of the call for marches in the country, which are regularly oriented towards workers, students, or political organisations. This was different and ground-breaking. To appeal to a less politically involved identity in public demonstrations such as the family, but at the same time, aiming for a more widespread category of participants that would be a more common shared experience, they tried to portray the so-called “average Chilean citizen,” which resonates more with a large range of people. Thus far, a sharp definition of what constitutes a family had not been articulated, as conservative or “family values” related. Conversely, it offered the opportunity to fill it with any kind of configuration intended, which, at this point, could help the march to achieve massive participation.

3.4. Where do we get a stage? Or how we meet the “Coordinadora”.

In addition to stating the streets where the march would take place, the authorisation document also asked for a stage as a designated endpoint of the event. In addition, the group realised that they would need microphones, amplifiers, speakers, and even a person to speak at the end of the rally.

This revealed two problems. First, the need for money and resources to acquire gear for the event. Second, it showed a lack of management skills for coordinating a massive demonstration.

Both setbacks lightened up the nature of the claims-advancing group, in that this was just a bunch of people who were organised online and not a formal political organisation with the sufficient ability to generate resources or even one with experience in coordinating events like this. At this point, some members of the Facebook groups started to call themselves “Indignados” (Indignants), creating some logos and even subgroups among them.

In parallel, since the call to the 24J march was already massively shared outside the Facebook groups among friends and acquaintances, this information arrived by chance to some of the members of the “Coordinadora” from their social media networks. This occurs

as an anecdote since they were “invited” to this event using the “No más AFP” slogan, even though it was the “Coordinadora” who started the struggle against the pension funds and created the claim years before. This is a notorious fact, since it reveals a complete disconnect between these online citizens and the people from the “Coordinadora,” even if both were working towards the same goals.

Then, some members of the “Coordinadora” began to search for the people behind this massive call. “So, I remember me saying: ‘no, this is the time. If there is a call for a march, let’s join. But let’s find out who they are’”¹³, said one of the female members of the “Coordinadora.” Later, they got the contact information for the women who applied for the permit in the Intendencia, they called them, and finally arranged a meeting in one of the offices of the “Coordinadora.”

The expectations of the meeting were different on both sides. The online activists were expecting to receive some help in terms of logistical skills, particularly for arranging the stage as an endpoint of the march, the amplifiers, and microphones. On the other side, the “Coordinadora” was not quite sure about what to expect, because they had neither heard about this group of citizens nor about why they were making this call for the march. This opened a space ready to be filled with speculation and rumours. “And, wouldn't they rather be managers of the AFPs who want to make us fall into the trap?”¹⁴ one of the members of the “Coordinadora” even commented once.

This situation also revealed the debate over to whom the slogan belongs. Both online activists and members of the “Coordinadora” were struggling to emphasize who started this movement. Was it the “Coordinadora” some years ago, when they formed as a more formal organisation and started their first tactics against the pension funds? Or was it this group of online citizens who coordinated the first massive protest in the country, popularizing the claim to a wider audience?

¹³ Woman, leader of “Coordinadora”, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

¹⁴ Woman, leader of “Coordinadora”, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

3.5. Who are you? The first meeting

The first encounter between the “Coordinadora” and the online activists was far from smooth going, at least at first sight.

Some additional members of the Facebook group were invited to this meeting as well, meeting each other face-to-face for the first time. Once sitting in the office of the “Coordinadora,” first impressions began to flourish. The locals expressed their concern about this online group of citizens and the possibility of hindering the movement. The latter tried to introduce themselves:

“We are ordinary people, citizens who are outraged with the subject of the AFPs, and we have seen a call on social media, and we have found it super valuable to do a march to know how many people disagree with the current pension system in Chile”.¹⁵

This was key, because it supported the identity of these online citizens being outraged about many things, but in this case, simply focusing their anger on the pension model.

On the other side, the members of the “Coordinadora” began to introduce themselves, talking about their activities, and explaining how they were constructing precise actions around the “No más AFP” claim. This was astonishing for the online citizens, who realised they were talking with people with a lot of experience. At the same time, people from the “Coordinadora” were also shocked: “I told them I have never heard about them in my life [...] and they were surprised that nobody knew them. None of those who were there knew them [the Indignant online citizens in the meeting]. Nobody”.¹⁶

Again, this reinforces the idea of the total disconnect between these two actors. Despite working towards a common goal, none of them knew what they were doing in parallel, and it seemed that it was not so easy to build bridges between the two groups. For this purpose, social media had a central role, in facilitating the communication between these two paths of activism that could build an alliance.

¹⁵ Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

¹⁶ Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

The previous idea can aid in better understanding this disconnect. On one hand, there is a group pursuing a path that is not so concerned about the use of social media as part of their activism, relying more on traditional tactics of discussion, organisation, and propaganda. Thus, they are not taking part in the online discussion about the “No más AFP” claim, in terms of social media conversations.

On the other hand, there is a group pursuing a path that emphasises a profound rejection of anything related to politics, presenting themselves as self-proclaimed “ordinary citizens,” revealing a group of people disenchanted with political promises, stressing their lack of participation in any political organisation. This can be traced from their restricted political formation and experience, and their ignorance about the roots and trade unions involved in the “No más AFP” movement.

Finally, after everything was clearly stated, the groups agreed to work together. Since the date of the march was already reserved by the online activists, they began to establish the next steps and different responsibilities. The joint coordination for the 24J march was taking shape.

3.6. Who owns it? Subsequent meetings before the 24J

After the first meeting, there were several others for preparing the march. The “Coordinadora” invited some representatives of these online citizens to more formal meetings, first, to establish a common ground for both parties, and second, to give some training about the pension model to the latter.

Thus, the division of labour was clear within the movement. The “Coordinadora” would take care of some technical issues for the march, such as the acquisition of a stage, loudspeakers and microphones, along with fleshing out the critiques of the AFPs and their experience. The group of online citizens would oversee amplifying the claim to a broader audience, particularly on social media. The results can be summarised as follows: “They [the “Coordinadora”] began to nurture us with their information, with their experience. Then, from our point of view, our contribution was the people.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Man, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

At this moment, there were still some differences of opinion about to whom the movement belonged. The online citizens were still arguing that since they made the convocation, established the date, and asked for permits, the march was their property. **“They offered us their help to coordinate the march”**¹⁸, said one of the members of the Facebook group. On the contrary, the “Coordinadora” maintained the ownership of the movement. **“We managed to make the jump** when we managed to conform with these groups of citizens”¹⁹, said one of the leaders of the “Coordinadora”.

At first glance, one could say that both parties were confirming the title of different but complementary things: the online citizens, with the march, and the members of the “Coordinadora,” with the movement from its origins. But this was far from easy. In their way of acknowledging these differences, they were trying to show who the titleholder of the social movement was. So, at this point, the question would be: who owns the movement? Or, in other words, does the movement belong to someone (or something) in particular? Perhaps a good starting point would be what an online Indignant expressed: “The cause [the claim] is not monopolised.”²⁰

Beyond this dilemma, both parties started to recognise in the other their strengths and capabilities. Members of the “Coordinadora” positively valued the social media and internet skills that the online citizens had. “They managed to break the blockade because they have a different communication channel in which they bathe, they swim like fish in the water.”²¹

Simultaneously, these online citizens recognised that the “Coordinadora” gave them some advice in terms of what to expect for convocation for a march, how to handle the excitement, and to not quit if things do not turn the way they expected:

In fact, several times when they saw us so excited, they told us: ‘hey, if few people arrive [to the march], do not let it get you down, this is little by little’. And we were very euphoric [...]

18 Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile. The emphasis is mine.

19 Woman, leader of “Coordinadora”, August 2016, Santiago de Chile. The emphasis is mine.

20 Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

21 Woman, leader of “Coordinadora”, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

We had very high expectations [...] They were hoping for five thousand people. We were expecting ten thousand. And they already found that this was too much for us.²²

3.7. The 24J itself. A fruitful outcome

Finally, the date arrived. That Sunday morning, demonstrations were happening all over the country. In the case of Santiago²³, a wide variety of people was seen. Entire families were marching, including parents, children, babies, grandparents, and even pets. Creativity was flourishing everywhere, transforming the march into an urban carnival, a real party in the street. People used creativity as a resource for expressing their anger, with lots of homemade banners and slogans, demanding the end of the pension model.

They mixed their rejection of the AFPs with popular culture in a fresh way. Some examples:

- Banners showing known cartoons such as Pokémon and Mafalda, with phrases portraying anger and rejection.
- People dressed as superheroes, jesters and clowns.
- A self-made banner saying “Andrade, marry me” (Andrade cástate conmigo), evoking the “jubilazo” case of the ex-wife of this politician.
- Several homemade banners with new meanings for the acronym AFP, like; Aquí se Fabrican Pobres (Here they Make the Poor), Ahorro Forzoso de los Pobres (Forced Savings of the Poor), Abusador-Farsante-Puerco (Abuser-Deceitful-Pig).

The march also had the presence of different political organisations, like collectives from the left, feminists, anti-capitalist groups, students’ unions, neighbourhood associations, ecologists, football hooligans, workers and trade unions, Mapuche people, LGBT groups, etcetera.

Nonetheless, the rejection of anything political was still in the air. A clear example happened in Santiago, where a group of citizens pushed a senator out of the march (El Mostrador,

²² Woman, active member of the Facebook group, August 2016, Santiago de Chile.

²³ I did participant observation in this city.

2016), flinging insults related to his work as a politician.²⁴ Also, there were some spontaneous expressions of discontent against groups with flags of political parties.²⁵

The march ended on a big stage, where the organisers started to give speeches. People from the “Coordinadora” and the online citizens’ groups had the opportunity to give a speech in front of a massive crowd. The event finished with all the participants singing the national anthem.

The previous example shows how this self-convoked demonstration became the 24J, a landmark of the “No más AFP” movement, since it activated a wave of uprising in the country. This first march was even greatly surpassed by the second march on Sunday, August 21 of 2016, at 11 am, when 300 thousand protesters showed up in the capital (Figueroa & Castillo, 2016). According to the organisers, there were 1,5 million protesters all around the country. There were also sit-ins outside the AFP at least once a month, boycotts with massive transfers to funds, pot-banging at certain times of the day, and a nationwide strike.

4. Discussion

By using significant milestones of the process of coordination of the 24J, I revealed some relevant features about the process of intersection and exchange between two paths of activism, which, when working together, could bring to life this massive demonstration all over the country.

As previously exposed, this was far from being an easy task. An emergent way of activism, which emerged from social media, began to take form, little by little, through a continuous online debate. This less structured path confronted a stouter, more traditional form of activism already present and dominant in the “No más AFP” movement. This encounter is important since it highlights three key points.

²⁴ The senator is Alejandro Navarro, former member of the Socialist Party, and former presidential candidate for the 2017 Chilean general elections..

²⁵ It involved members of the Communist Party in Iquique. Also, senator Eugenio Tuma in Temuco.

Firstly, two paths that were struggling against the same idea were completely disconnected from each other. This poses the question of how the creation of a common field or even bridges can be facilitated, where social movements start to unite different perspectives and ways of seeing the world that can enrich and strengthen them, with the endpoint of keeping a stable goal or horizon. Naturally, there will be some ways of doing activism that would be more suitable in different contexts or moments of the movement, but the challenge is to create a space to engage them in conversation and to see how they can learn from each other to be on the same page as much as possible.

This is supported by the idea of increasing cognitive diversity (Landemore, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), in this case, applied within a social movement. In other words, to enable the participation of different individuals and groups in the movement, instead of reinforcing the abilities of the activists already present, put simply, “more is smarter” (Landemore, 2012, p. 7), in terms of bringing unknown and emergent answers in to expand the possibilities of the movement.

Secondly, how the main course of activism of a social movement can be questioned from several fronts. Many social movements have a strong and unique way of doing their activism, which becomes a tradition that is difficult to question or expand. If the latter happens, this is usually done on their terms, far from being completely creative. With this analysis, I question this idea, enlarging the sense and possibilities of the movement, and developing collective knowledge outside the limits of the hegemony of knowledge (Sousa-Santos, 2006c). For example, anticipating less conventional forms of participation and logistics within a movement (for instance, the intensive use of social media for coordinating collective action and the development of malaise), and emergent identities as a source of struggle (such as the ordinary citizen and the family), in addition, rather than in opposition, to traditional identities (like the worker organised in trade unions).

Thirdly, and connected to the previous point, this example warns social movement scholars to be more alert when studying a particular case, avoiding the “single movement approach” (McAdam, 1995). Seeing the movement as a single unit of analysis, emphasizing structure over process, and focusing on just one movement, rather than a cycle of protest. Instead, I agree that social movements are more a result of negotiations between a diversity of actors and temporal arrangements (Melucci, 1996). Therefore, I suggest assuming their dynamic, never static, nature.

Although an examination of a single movement has been presented, it is far from the single movement approach. I go beyond, in terms of examining the underlying complexities found within the movement, investigating its apparent uniformness by exposing the outcome, in this case, the 24J demonstration, as a result of a vigorous process, which contained tensions, problems and learned knowledge. It is enough to scratch the appearance of the movement a little bit to find all these underlying forces.

Accordingly, this investigation brought to light a part of the movement that has not normally been revealed, but in the end, it is part of the same coin, a challenge of working together, despite being different (Arendt, 1993), in this case, dissimilar activist routines.

This poses an interesting dilemma, which asks about the definition of the origins of a social movement. Was the movement already performing when the “Coordinadora” was born? Or was it when the claim trickled down to the discussion on social media from the “Indignant”? Or even further, was it when these two activist cultures intersected and started to work together?

Posing these questions as final thoughts may open a route for future discussions about converging activisms in the movement. Nonetheless, we can still embrace the 24J as “the day Chile woke up”²⁶, declaring the beginning of the end of the pension fund system in Chile en masse.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

²⁶ In Spanish: El día en que Chile despertó.

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