

Notes on Lebanon from Interview with Moris Nohra, President of the National Council of the Communist Party of Lebanon. – June 2006

The recent and ongoing crises in the middle east as our media likes to call it (but what more truthfully should be referred to as the illegal invasion, occupation and destruction of a sovereign state and sovereign people by its imperialist neighbour Israel) has little to do with two kidnapped soldiers nor to do with combating terrorism in the region. These were just the contexts and opportunities presented to Israel and used by Israel for its imperialist policy in the region and in particular with regard the Lebanon, its people and importantly its resources. Much as the atrocities of September 11th 2001 were used by the US for its designs globally, Israel has used the kidnapping of 2 Israeli Defence Force, IDF, soldiers to cripple a competing power, to re-ignite tensions and conflicts, to 'legitimise' its occupation of Palestine and its crackdown on its own citizens civil rights, and ultimately to destroy attempts at democracy and sovereignty in the region as they are the ultimate threat to Israel.

The Lebanon is a small country, about the size of Leinster, it has a population of about 3.8 million and borders with Israel, Syria and Egypt. Its modern history has been plagued by conflict and war both internal and external. It has already suffered great destruction and loss at the hands of Israel in both the 1967 war and through its civil war, 1975-1991. Indeed former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is wanted by the International Criminal Court of Justice for war crimes committed against Lebanon, to be precise he is guilty of the indiscriminate bombing of villages murdering hundreds of civilian men, women and children.

Although the Lebanon is only a small country it is home to an extremely rich mix of cultures, beliefs and traditions. This has and can be a vital strength but has also been used to ferment division and hatred bringing destruction to the area. The policy of divide and rule that we know so well in this country will be used by elites for their own destructive ends and can be seen as part of Israel's current attempt to re-ignite civil conflict to weaken its neighbour.

Ethnically the country is divided among the two largest groups Arab and Levantine, with a sizable Armenian population, among other small groups. In religious terms there are large populations of Muslims, Christians, Druzes and Jew. But these are not all united either, for example, there are Greek Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, several Sunni sects and Shia sects. And under the peace settlement the structural and institutional set up if the state reflect this religious divide.

The power-sharing arrangement that was negotiated by elites in the Lebanon and globally set up a Parliamentary Republic that is entirely unique in the world. However, the structural arrangement in our 6 counties is its closest partner. The institutions of control and governance in the state are sectarian. The parliament is arranged to represent all 18 or so sects in the country with an electoral system that actually punishes non-sectarian and secular parties, of which there is only one, the Communist Party of Lebanon. Also add to this a sectarian and powerful private and State media, that serve the narrow interests of elites. The Communist Party does achieve a popular vote higher than many of the most represented sects yet receives far fewer seats in return. The State governs, controls and manipulates against the interests of ordinary people, as represented by the Communist Party, the Trade Unions, the League of Lebanese Women's Rights and the Lebanese Democratic Youth Union, the only non-sectarian youth organisation.

The Lebanese Communist Party is a party of working people for a democratic secular Lebanon. It has representatives and branches across the country and in every community, the only party that can boast such power. This is because it is a party that fights along class lines

NOT religious or ethnic ones. It understands the divide and rule policy that imperialism plays to keep ordinary people from uniting and realising their destiny of controlling their own lives and living in peace. A policy again we understand so well here in Ireland. Formed in 1924 it has throughout its long and proud history fought for national independence and socialism as two sides of the same coin. The Lebanese CP, just like the Communist Party of Ireland, understands and struggles for the Connolly concept of national liberation. Today national independence in a former colony is impossible without building socialism. Just as Ireland is subject still to Britain, and more recently the US and the EU, Lebanon is greatly controlled by outside forces within and without the Arab world. And again like Ireland, imperialism finds a parasitic and morales class within the country to enforce its rule, aims and designs to divide and weaken the struggle of ordinary people for better conditions, peace and socialism.

Imperialisms Designs

Lebanon has for centuries been subject to outside influences and rule. Its strategic position, its coastline, and more importantly its water resources mean it will continue to attract the attention of parasitic states like Israel, who will suck the water supplies and resources from Lebanon for their own benefit. And much like Ireland's colonial position in the British Empire, Lebanon will never be allowed grow too strong or compete with its neighbour economically. This is the real truth and real reason behind Lebanon's latest occupation and upon the latest suffering its people must face. Israel, and its backers the US and the EU, will not allow it grow into a successful, secular, democratic state that has the potential to be a beacon to the oppressed of the region.

As mentioned briefly already, the class division in Lebanon is like most former colonies including Ireland. The wealth, resources and labour power, is extracted through 'legal and constitutional' means as opposed to in former days through blatant violent occupation. However, this legal form of plunder has its lapses and its chinks, shown up recently in Israel's violent aggression. If a country challenges the peaceful robbery of its resources it will suffer a tragic fate, similar to Allende in Chile. Imperialism must often result to violence to secure its domination, as has been seen so evidently in the Middle-East post-September 11th 2001.

The use of religious, ethnic and manufactured division's have always been a favourite weapon of the powerful for weakening the many who suffer. In this country we have a similar parallel to the Lebanon and as we know it is not religion or ethnicity that really divides this country, but class. A more thorough examination shows how elites from all groupings, in Ireland as in Lebanon, use ethnicity and religion to strengthen their dominant position in society. They manipulate the ordinary people so as to hang to the coat tails of former colonial rulers and newly emerging imperial blocs. In Ireland we have that class that benefits from privatisation, from the sale of Irelands resources, from an over-emphasis on foreign direct investment, and from the protection and support the US and EU provide for their local domination. The Lebanon has the very same class.

The 'West' calls this class the democratic movement in the Middle East but we know and understand what this really means. They are those people who will allow a free reign to the US and EU to exploit natural and labour resources to the detriment of the native society. You will see a 'brain drain' of human labour as much as of natural resources. The best and most educated will get jobs in the 'west' while the underdevelopment of the home country will be continually exacerbated. You will also see a vulgar and grotesque 'westernisation' of culture where consumption of the latest, fads, trends, and fetishes will represent billion dollar markets for the west. This has occurred in our country, is occurring in Lebanon and will occur across the rest of the 'former' colonial world. The success of a few home based elites, like in Ireland in the banking and financial services sector, gives the economy the façade of development

while in reality undermining industrial growth and real development. The harsh reality will be ever present and will constantly appear in many forms of opposition, violent and peaceful, self-expressive and clear, confused and reactionary.

This form of 'economic development' pushed by the US, EU, IMF, WTO, World Bank and every multinational across the globe leads to economic, and therefore political, dependence. We know this in Ireland, the case of Shannon airport or Rosport are just two obvious examples. It is not development and only serves to line the pockets of powerful business's and their small domestic class that governs in their interests. It is short sighted and leads to economic vulnerability.

The forces mobilised in Lebanon now, the 'leftist patriotic forces' have an opportunity to advocate a political and economic direction of independence and sovereignty, but we know this will lead them into further conflict with imperialism, the US, the EU and most importantly its neighbour Israel. Israel knows its enemies and they are sovereignty and independence for Middle Eastern states. They will stop at nothing to prevent this, as we have seen in the slaughter of innocents in Lebanon and Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Imperialism is much more than just a scramble for resources. It is cultural, psychological and political too. It is about creating markets and creating divisions. However, in recent times we are once again seeing a rush to divide the worlds resources between the most powerful. Those countries who retain control of their resources and frustrate imperialism's ambitions are labelled evil, Cuba, Venezuela, and North Korea.

The invasion of Lebanon was as much about resources as it was about igniting divisions. The Lebanon is a water rich country in a water deficient region. The south of Lebanon has key canals and a precious source. For years the Israeli's have been illegally tapping this water supply and robbing the Lebanese people of their wealth. Water is also the reason for the continued occupation of the Golan Heights. The kidnapping of the two IDF soldiers presented an opportunity to further strengthen Israel dominance in the region and their access to water.

Lebanon too has been suffering from underinvestment in its water resources and a wastage of much 'surface water'. Successive government have failed to make any substantial commitment, connected to a lack of interest from the 'west' in providing support to the Lebanese state for a national state-led plan. The Lebanese Communist Party has for many years campaigned for a national strategy to maximise their precious resource, in particular much-needed dams and canals for irrigation (only one dam being built in the last 30 years with one currently under construction). The provision of water remains public in Lebanon and this must be fought for as privatisation of water globally increases.

In Mexico Coca-Cola have begun the privatisation of the large water supplies. In Bolivia, too, water is increasingly becoming a source of a wealth for elites, although hopefully the recent election of Morales can make a difference, and elsewhere around the world this robbery is carried out under the mask of 'developmental strategies' sponsored by the IMF and WTO. Ireland too, in the six counties especially, has seen recent attacks upon water provisions as a public service.

The Communist Party of Lebanon

As previously mentioned in these notes the Lebanese Communist Party is the only party represented in every region, every community, and every ethnic and religious group. They, more than anyone else in Lebanon, truly are a Lebanese party, a party of ordinary Lebanese working people. Founded in 1924 it is also one of the oldest Lebanese parties. Very much

conscious of its Arab character it unites the key concepts of national and social liberation in a manner very similar to Ireland's party and to Connolly's analysis.

The Parties activities and areas of struggle are very much defined by their particular situation, and, like the CP in Ireland, they must strive to overcome petty sectarianism and chauvinism in ordinary working people and families. They must struggle against a media and international agenda that views and promotes the conflict as religious or ethnic. They must combat prevailing ideologies that confuse and worse manipulate working people in a way fascism did in the 20's and 30's. In this light secularism in State activity is both a principle and pragmatic demand of the CPL. They have tirelessly campaigned for secularism to be enshrined in the constitution of the early 90's.

The sectarian nature of state institutions means the CP is unrepresented in parliament even while achieving a popular vote higher than many of the larger parties. With this in mind and in keeping with communist tradition trade unions are a key area of activity and action. Like in cities like Belfast, trade unions have a unique position of drawing membership from the otherwise divided communities and brings its members together upon class lines. Trade unions can also provide a key material and ideological medium in which workers unity is won. It provides a key combatant against the state and elite led sectarianism. The CPL plays a key role in many unions and has recently led demonstrations and strikes of 300,000 secondary school teachers.

Sadly the unions lost many outstanding leaders in the countries civil war. The unions are now most represented in professional workers while underrepresented in traditional manufacturing groups. The massive influx of foreign workers has also led to new problems, issues and struggles. Trade Union activism remains a key area of struggle for the CPL.

The Party also played an active role in the 'patriotic resistance' to the recent Israeli invasion and occupation, particularly in the town of Sarifa. The Party over the years has lost many comrades in struggle and this was another occasion for such sacrifice. Although the CP is strictly non-sectarian it does engage with some of the sectarian organisations for the successful resistance to outside forces. The leftist resistance played a hugely important role in mobilising communities involved in the fighting and also involved in day to day survival and rebuilding.

The Lebanese Party believes they are and will play a crucial role in denying imperialism its ambitions in the Middle East.

“The form of the 'new Middle East' that the United States wants has begun to take shape, particularly since the Iraq war and the blockade of Ghaza. It is a Middle East based on the abrogation of the Sykes-Picot agreement – not in order to replace it with greater co-operation, cohesion and unity, of course, but with fragmentation. They want to transform this region by creating feuding sectarian entities, the strongest of which would be the Zionist entity, which is fundamentally based upon two concepts: the invincible army, and racists Jewish tribalism. On that basis they would be able to directly dominate all the mini-states in the region and plunder all their resources.

... we believe that new forms will be born in the Arab world on the basis of the victory of the resistance and the steadfastness of the Lebanese people – forms in whose creation the people will play a basic role. Meanwhile we are striving so that the forces of democracy and progress in Arab society will take their place within the framework of constructing this coming Arab world.” – Dr. Khaled Haddadeh general secretary of the Lebanese Communist Party.

