PUTTING THE POWER BACK IN YOUR HANDS

– *Beyond* talks to Farid Chehab, who wants to create a national consensus about the economy.

Words ALEX GREY

Farid Chehab is a man on a mission. The founder of KGI (Civic and Political Group of Influence), is seeking to put control of the Lebanese economy, and by extension, the direction in which the country is heading, into the hands of its people. Chehab's brainchild, KGI, promises to form what he refers to as a blended company, under a mixture of state and citizen control, to oversee the vital elements of Lebanon's economy – its natural resources – the sun, water, and the environment. KGI's launching was marked by the publication of Chehab's inspirational manifesto, a book titled *Bet for a National Conscience*, which is currently available online.

Beyond: What is KGI?
Farid Chehab: The key element of the whole idea is this: If I want to build a national consciousness, let me start with the economy. Let us create a participative, common opinion about the economy, an economic consensus, which will become a common consensus about a goal. If this works, chances are that people will see the tangible benefits of becoming partners with one another. If they become partners, then there will be no more hurdles to overcome when talking together. From that you get a consciousness, a feeling that people can achieve things together. This is the thinking.

LP: So what are the unifying issues here?
FC: First and foremost is the water. Water is all over the country, from North to South. Everyone has an interest in water; it's for everyone. Water can become a national cause. It would belong to the Lebanese people, not a government, not a minister. The thinking is that we shouldn't talk about water as an initiative carried out by one person. It's like Roosevelt's New Deal. It's for everybody; it's our property.

Contained within the book is a study by Parsons Maine, the biggest hydrological company in the world, a huge company with a track record. In 1990 Parsons Maine scanned Lebanon via satellite and it reported that if we took it seriously and did things in a holistic manner, and acted carefully, in five years we could have, in the worst case, an extra two billion cubic liters of water for sale. On a sustainable basis, Lebanon could raise $5 billion a year through water sales.

LP: The book also talks about solar power. Tell us about your ideas.
FC: In the US, in two years' time the cost of producing solar energy will be similar to that of producing traditional forms of energy. At present, at peak hours, in California the price of solar energy is equivalent to the price of fuel energy. The higher the consumption, the higher the price. The experts say that in 2-3 years' time, we'll be at parity, thanks to new technology.

Let's create solar farms on the barren mountains. You can't do anything with the land on the mountainsides; it's useless. Let's use it. You're generating electricity. You're also creating jobs and industries through infrastructure programs. Together with hydroelectric power, you're creating jobs, power, and common interests.

LP: What do you mean when you talk about "air" in the book?
FC: In terms of the physical environment, it's reforestation. In 25 years time you can change your environment. It's not a dream; it's not something for your grandchildren; it's for you. If you do it, you can see it in your lifetime. Everyone will see the benefits. This one is the easiest one to do. You can motivate and involve everyone, corporate groups, kids, everyone. You just need the will; it's simple. Do it all simultaneously across the country. Let's mobilize the population, create a special day, a theme. It needs a vision. ○

Bet for a National Conscience can be found at pari-rihan.org

