

Episode 6: The trees of Lebanon, and a grandmother in the United States

On June 6th, 2022 an episode of the PBS Newshour featured interviews with charity workers in Lebanon, who are trying, from Tripoli, Lebanon, to help feed rural residents of Lebanon living in poverty. One person interviewed walks and drives around Lebanon trying to keep residents from chopping down and burning the trees of Lebanon. Fuel costs, including the price of legally logged wood, are all high, so residents are illegally chopping down the trees of Lebanon. The person who is charged with stopping this illegal logging says that if this continues, where forests were, there will only be rocks in four years. The Lebanese people are living in such extreme poverty that they stand in food lines in Tripoli and accept other forms of charitable help, which are in short supply. In a home that has a refrigerator, the refrigerator no longer works because natural gas for the home has run out. The residents are chopping up the shelves and furniture in the house for wood fuel.

Contrast this with United States residents who give the reason of poverty for burning wood in the United States. If people are living in poverty in the United States, before they have to resort to chopping up the furniture for fuel, they have government assistance available for help with their heating bills in the form of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (L.I.H.E.A.P.) for heating with fuel other than wood. The most recent story told to justify United States wood burning is that a grandmother likes to walk her property, collect fallen wood, and burn it in her wood stove, in a home that has the alternative of natural gas heat. The wood is burned strictly for recreation, and there are services for hauling away refuse in her community. This burning is done by the grandmother of the person telling the story. The grandchild does not attempt to connect the grandmother with help with energy costs from L.I.H.E.A.P. the United States' Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, because high energy cost is not the reason wood is being burned. The pollution of wood smoke emission particulates is generated for recreation. The grandmother's wood stove is inefficiently heating a home, or wood is burned in the summer for recreation. The grandmother's health, and most importantly to RAWSEP, the health of innocent near neighbors of the wood burner, is imperiled each time wood is burned instead of clean fuel like natural gas, or geothermal heat, solar energy or wind energy is not used for energy generation. In this story, there is some reference to tradition, which may, instead of tradition, be a grandmother's response to the wood burning industry's hectoring insistence on her burning wood instead of clean fuel, for the profit of the wood burning industry.