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Knesset Member Nitzan Horowitz on WAC-MA'AN Tour: "I Saw Arab Women Who Want to Work"

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The workers' organization WAC-MA'AN ran a tour of agricultural farms in the Sharon Plain on the 3rd December, to make a stand regarding the state of employment among farm workers. The tour was held against the backdrop of recent farmers' protests, demanding the government import more manpower from Thailand (which is cheap and exploitable), while thousands of Arab women remain outside the labor market without means of livelihood. It's difficult to compete with a worker who earns two thirds of the minimum wage and is willing to work from dawn till dusk. The tour was attended by Knesset Member Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz party), representatives of the Hotline for Migrant Workers, and academics from the Academic College Of Emek Yezreel, who recently hosted WAC's farm workers in a joint conference under the title: "Women, Work and Family"

www.wac-maan.org.il/en/article_131.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L350xH263/nizan_horovits-1002d.jpg

During the tour, members of the delegation met with farmers who employ both Thai and Arab workers, the latter of which are organized under WAC and therefore receive all the rights entitled to them by law. The first farmer employs an even number of foreign and local workers; the second employs twelve Thai workers and five local workers. Dani Ben-Simhon, who coordinates the placement project of women in agriculture on behalf of WAC told the delegation that "our experience shows that even farmers who are prepared to employ workers through WAC see them as a 'spare tire'". The moment the quota for Thai workers rises our workers are dismissed. In addition the delegation members met the working women's groups and an unemployed woman, one of a thousand in WAC's database looking for work, who vividly described her unsuccessful efforts to find work.

Even those visitors who were familiar with the topic, gained new understandings and perceptions from visiting the area: rich moshavim (agricultural communities), farmers who threaten they'll be made bankrupt if they don't receive their ration of cheap Thai workers, and 'expensive' female Arab workers from poor villages who can only find temporary and seasonal work, inhibiting their ability to plan their budgets and make a living.

Knesset Member Nitzan Horowitz concluded the tour thus:

"WAC's struggle has influence and it has power. The issue is entering further public awareness, and it's necessary to continue raising it all the time. The problem does not belong solely to those who are unemployed, rather to the whole State of Israel that needs to decide what it prefers. The state's reliance on cheap and exploited manpower harms everyone, and needs to move in a different direction. We are not against foreign workers rather we are trying to solve the harsh problem of unemployment in the country. Today we saw that there are Arab women and men, who are prepared to work hard in return for the minimum wage, and are prepared to meet farmers' demands, yet most of the time they prefer labor which is on call day and night ,cheaper and without rights."