

Jewish Bosses and Arab Employers

Why do the workers from Ras el-Tin prefer to work "illegally", through sub-contractors, than through labour exchanges? And why do they prefer to work in Israel, and face a daily routine of national humiliation than to work for an Arab employer in the West Bank, when such work is available for equal wages?

There are a number of advantages involved in being a registered worker, including health insurance and work compensation for accidents and lay-off periods. Against this, an average of 30% of the worker's salary is deducted by his employer as social tax, of which only about one half is paid as social benefits.³ However, these benefits are not always accessible to the worker and many have to go to great lengths to claim them. Hussein explained that only totally unskilled workers go through labour exchanges. Workers in Ras el-Tin, together with an estimated one-third of all workers from the occupied territories and perhaps more, prefer to forego these privileges and work illegally. The following reasons are given: (1) work with sub-contractors is arranged informally and through relatives. It assures quick assignments, no redtape, and almost no waiting periods between one assignment and another; (2) considerable saving is assured by not paying the social benefits tax amounting, on average, to 30% of one's income; (3) work accidents are covered by the Israeli employer who, although not obliged by contract to do this, is already violating the law by not paying his share of the social tax.

When Hussein broke his hand while on an assignment in 1977, his Tel Aviv boss refused to pay the I.L. 500 bill for his hospital treatment until Hussein threatened to take him to labour court, after which the man yielded. However, Hussein was laid-off at home for 3 months without any compensation. Still, Hussein is willing to take the risks