

The Appeal

Support Arab railway workers in Israel in their struggle to keep their jobs!

Call on Israel Railways to revise its new policy requiring army service as an employment condition!

This policy is clearly discriminatory: it disqualifies Arab workers because Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are exempt from service in the Israeli army.

The appeal was developed in cooperation with Arab railway workers who have been sacked as a result of this policy.

ENDORSE THE APPEAL

Background

In March 2009, Israel Railways, a state-owned company, launched a new policy denying employment to railroad crossing guards who have no permit to carry weapons – that is: who have not served in the Israeli army. This policy will lead to the lay-off of the app. 150 Arab railway workers who monitor and maintain Israel's level crossings. Israel Railways explicitly stated that the new employment policy is designed to give priority to young army veterans.

Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel have always been extremely underrepresented in Israel's public sector (including state-owned companies), and despite existing anti-discrimination laws only about 5% of civil servants are Arabs, while they make up almost 20% of the overall population. Exclusion of Arabs from the public sector is mainly a result of Israel's state security policies, which deny Arabs who have not served in the Israeli army and do thus not have a permit to carry weapons access to employment in public administration and services (such as: communication, water, electricity, public transport and port authorities, fire brigades etc.). This strong focus on state security is also reflected in the biographies of executive officers in Israeli government-owned companies. Yitzhak 'Haki' Harel, general manager of Israel Railways, for instance, is a Major General in the Israeli army (IDF). He retired from the army in August 2006, shortly after the July War on Lebanon, and has headed the company since 2007.

Israel Railways' new policy is an instructive example of the way Arab workers are systematically excluded from the Israeli labour market: firstly, it shows that state security takes absolute preference over personal safety and security in Israel's employment policy; secondly, it reveals that these security concerns are used to camouflage double standards in favour of Jewish Israeli workers because a) the job of crossing guard has so far not required bearing arms, b) other railway workers, such as train drivers, are not addressed by the new policy, and c) some positions are reserved for "minorities who did not serve in the army". This allows the conclusion that army service is in fact an irrelevant employment condition. At this point, it should be noted that the new policy also excludes recent immigrants, ultra-orthodox Jews, disabled persons and conscientious objectors.

On April 7, 2009, the Tel Aviv Labour Court suspended the dismissal of the railway workers until the next court hearing on April 19, 2009. However, workers told Sawt el-Amel that Israel Railways has already started recruiting new crossing guards. On April 8, 2009, Israel Railways responded to Sawt el-Amel's enquiry about the new employment policy, reaffirming that the policy decision is based on 'practical and security considerations' and does not aim to 'discriminate against minorities'.

On the whole, Israel Railways' new employment policy should be seen both as a continuation of Israel's long-standing strategy to exclude Arab workers from the labour market and as an assault on all economically and socially marginalised groups in times of growing economic crisis.

What you can do:

1) Endorse the appeal

Fill in the 'Endorse the Appeal' form below and send it to: laborers@laborers-voice.org

2) Forward the appeal to your colleagues and friends

3) Encourage your organisation/branch to endorse the appeal

Fill in the 'Endorse the Appeal' form below and send it to: laborers@laborers-voice.org

Attach your organisation's logo to the email

4) Write a protest letter to Israel Railways

Copy-paste the sample letter below or write your own message to:

Yitzhak Harel, CEO
Israel Railways

Fax: +972 (0)3 6937480

Email: pniyot@rail.co.il

CC your email/fax to Sawt el-Amel:

Sawt el-Amel

Email: laborers@laborers-voice.org

Fax: +972 (0)4 6080917

Sample letter to Israel Railways:

Dear Mr. Yitzhak Harel,

I am concerned about Israel Railways' new policy requiring army service and weapons training as an employment condition for guards at level crossings. Since Arab citizens of Israel are exempt from obligatory army service, it can be assumed that all or most Arab crossing guards will be laid off as a consequence of this policy decision.

This contradicts the fundamental right of workers to equality and non-discrimination in employment, and consequently, the policy should be revised.

I would much appreciate to hear your position on this issue.

Sincerely,

Signatories:

Organisations:

**Sawt el-Amel/The Laborer's Voice
Intal, Belgium**

**Association Tutti-Frutti International Développement Solidarté, France
UNISON (the public service trade union), U.K.**

Brighton & Hove District Trades Union Council, U.K.

Brighton & Hove UNISON Local Government, U.K.

Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, U.K.

**New York City Labor Against the War, U.S.A.
PGFTU - Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, Palestine**

Individuals:

TaherJayousi, Railway Worker

Assad Salami, Railway Worker

Ibrahim Nasrallah, Railway Worker

Luqman Salami, Railway Worker

Mustapha Matani, Railway Worker

Karim Qadi, Railway Worker

Ali Rabus, Railway Worker

Yussef Nasrallah Railway Worker

Amir Hamoudi, Railway Worker

Ahmad Hamoudi, Railway Worker

Jibrán Naddaf, Chairperson Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Auni Banna, Attorney, Board Member Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Haifa Shehadi, Board Member Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Awni Zidani, Board Member Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Wehbe Badarne, Director Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Marie Badarne, Int'l Relations Sawt el-Amel, Nazareth

Fakher Badarne, Young Workers Sawt el-Amel, Majd el-Krum

Maha Krayyem, Women's Platform Sawt el-Amel, Majd el-Krum

Tawfeiq Tibi, Advocate, Insaf Centre, Taybeh

Ramzi Suleiman, University of Haifa
Barend Claessens, ACV-CSC, Belgium
Younis Biadsi, Baqa al-Gharbiyeh
Heidi Paredes, Beit al-Musiqqa, Shefamer
Rasha Hilwi, Beit al-Musiqqa, Shefamer
Tawfiq Natour, Abna al-Balad
Melanie Atrash
Kifah AbdelHalim, Jerusalem
Mayss Nasser, al-Tireh
Frances Raday, Jerusalem
Elizabeth Bishop, Ph.D., Texas State University, U.S.A.
James E Vann, Oakland Tenants Union, U.S.A.
Riya al-Sanaa, Bir as-Sabaa/Beer Sheva
Smadar Carmon, NION and IJV Toronto, Canada
John Porter, Glasgow, Scotland
Frank Barat, PSC-Russell Tribunal on Palestine, U.K.
Dr. Ted Swedenburg, University of Arkansas, U.S.A.
Dr. Laleh Khalili, SOAS, U.K.
Aharon Eviatar, Hofit, Israel
Peter Eglin, Kitchener/Canada
Elizabeth Spradley, University of Arkansas-Middle East Studies, U.S.A.
Anna Miransky, Canada
David Hillman, Oxford, U.K.
Mark LeVine, Ph.D., UC Irvine, U.S.A.
Alam Sher, Glasgow, Scotland
Guy Bollag, Jewish Voice for a Just Peace between Israel and Palestine, Switzerland
Nadine MÉOUCHY, Institut français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo), Lebanon
Ola Sweetat, Attorney, Tarshiha
Dr Robert Boyce, London School of Economics, England
Brenda Maddock

Endorse the appeal:

Type of endorsement: Individual/Organisation

Name/Contact person

Organisation

City/State

Email*

Date

