



جمعية صوت العامل النقابية
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Major Victory for Civil Society Struggle against the Wisconsin Plan

Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour, Eli Yishai, announces extensive amendments to Israel's Wisconsin Plan; General Director of the programme, Dorit Novak, resigns, denying any link to the changes

On September 19, Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labour, Eli Yishai from the ultra-orthodox Shas party, announced major changes to the Wisconsin Plan, which will be sent to the Knesset Finance Committee for approval by January 2007. On the same day, the General Director of the Wisconsin administration "Mehalev", Dorit Novak, resigned from her position, though denying any link to the overhaul of the programme. Instead, she quoted her appointment of director of the Yad Vashem (Holocaust Remembrance Authority) International School for Holocaust Studies as the reason for her resignation.

Yishai had appointed a committee to investigate the sustainability and feasibility of the Wisconsin Plan, and the amendments reflect the recommendations of the committee's report to the Ministry and also key points of Sawt el-Amel's criticism. The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour presented the following changes to the Wisconsin Plan at a press conference on Tuesday, September 19, 2006, which affect:

- ♦ Men and women within seven years of the retirement age;
- ♦ Long-term unemployed who have received income benefits for more than five years;
- ♦ Single mothers with children up to 12 years, holding part-time jobs;
- ♦ Mentally and physically challenged people (according to recommendations from an independent committee).

These "special needs" groups will no longer be required to attend the Wisconsin centres full-time (30-40 hours/week) but will be assigned to a so-called bypass programme and required to attend only two hours a week. Eligibility for exemption from the Wisconsin Plan will be examined by an independent committee, comprised of social workers, psychologists and doctors, and no longer by an internal body of the Wisconsin administration. Minister Eli Yishai noted that these changes will affect approximately 25% of the current participants. In Nazareth, however, the percentage is most likely to be considerably higher as the local Wisconsin Plan clientele is overwhelmingly long-term unemployed, physically challenged and/or elderly.



The amendments to the Wisconsin Plan are a major success for Sawt el-Amel and its civil society partners engaged in challenging the Plan, as the changes address key issues of our campaign against this unsustainable welfare-to-work plan.

Hence, for Sawt el-Amel, the struggle goes on. While we welcome the Ministry's decision to exclude the most vulnerable from full-time attendance of the Wisconsin centres, we will continue our campaign against the Wisconsin Plan as a solution to poverty and unemployment. The Wisconsin Plan does not address the structural problems within the Arab community, caused by systematic discrimination in budget, infrastructure and education, which lead to unemployment and poverty. Therefore, Sawt el-Amel maintains its commitment to stop the Wisconsin Plan by the end of the pilot period in June 2007.