

Tatiana's holiday skillet

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By Ariel Rubinstein

(Translation from Hebrew Ira Moskowitz)

As Passover approaches, employers are competing over the size of holiday gifts. Bank Hapoalim is granting each employee NIS 1,200. The workers at the Prime Minister's Office are receiving NIS 750 and teachers will get just NIS 400. Tatiana (almost her real name) is employed through a large and well-known contractor as a cleaning woman at Tel Aviv University. She, like the contractor's other employees, received a gift for Passover last year. A skillet. How sensitive and benevolent this employer was to remember Tatiana on the eve of the festival of freedom.

Tatiana brought the skillet she received to my office. It seems that the skillet is a bit shy, because it does not display the name of its manufacturer. I set out to check how much it costs. At the local mall, they looked at me as if I had come to the pharmacy to check the price of nails. I then dragged the skillet to the Carmel open-air market. A stall owner told me that he would not dare to sell a skillet of such inferior quality. He estimated the price of the skillet at NIS 30. The contractor purchased hundreds of skillets, and if he paid more than NIS 20 it would indicate that the private sector also suffers from a lack of efficiency.

This is the way it should be. Even Tatiana, a soul adrift on the Ramat Aviv campus, receives a holiday gift "just like" someone who works at Bank Hapoalim. I spoke with the general manager of the contracting firm and he was very proud of providing this benefit to his workers. He was surprised that I had not read in the newspaper that 70% of private employers do not give any holiday gift and said he was one of the few who award their workers with a nice bonus. A problem in reading comprehension: The newspaper item noted that 75% of private employers do give holiday gifts.

Let's not grumble about the value of the gift. An "appropriate" holiday gift should be in accordance with the status and salary of the employee. Those who are close to the

boardroom, of course, receive a substantial gift, while those who are close to the dunghill and receive minimum wage should receive a small present, a very small one indeed. Not only is market capitalism prospering, but there is also justice in the world!

There is a small postscript to this story. It turns out that Tatiana's pay stub shows that her employer deducts NIS 10 from her salary each month for "gifts." Go figure this out: The skillet is worth about NIS 30 and perhaps it cost the contractor NIS 20. From Rosh Hashanah to Passover, NIS 10 was docked from Tatiana's salary each month. This means that Tatiana paid NIS 60 for the right to receive the skillet as a "gift."

The contractor claims that his actions are completely legitimate. Tatiana had indeed given her consent (probably unknowingly) to the deductions for "holiday gift payments" by signing a scandalous document that is brazenly entitled "personal employment contract." In this document, Tatiana also promises to pay the employer NIS 1,000 if she quits her work before the end of her first year. It is hard for me to believe that lawmakers approved the absurd notion that a worker should pay for a gift the employer gives him or her. What is certain is that there is no one to make sure that the employer gives a gift of fair value.

I have heard many stories about the exploitation of workers employed by contractors at Tel Aviv University. Nonetheless, this story is truly surreal. So perhaps we should place a skillet on the Passover seder table this year, alongside the matzoth and wine. We will remember the children of Israel who labored as slaves for Pharaoh in Egypt and we also will not forget Tatiana and the rest of the children of Israel who are being exploited this very week on the grassy campus of Tel Aviv University.

A happy and kosher Passover to you Tatiana, and regards to Eliyahu HaTishbi.

The writer is a professor of economics at Tel Aviv University.