

The class struggle as a source of inspiration: "A Shining Meteor will Light the Path of the Worker"

(from the website of the Communist Party of Israel)

By Tamar Gozasnky—

As far as I know, this is the first time an artist is putting on a show in Israel about a topic that is obscure for most Israelis –class struggle in Mandatory Palestine, in the early 1930s. In those days, hired Arab laborers were the majority among the production and services workforce, including government agencies such as railways, ports, and the post, as well as the Haifa facilities of the Iraqi IPC, a multinational partnership of the big oil corporations. Toran presents in his show images of labor leaders, including the Communist Bulus Farah, who have had a major part in the struggle of the railway workers. As in other large workplaces, the workers had to deal with the British rulers, but also with the *Histadrut* (the Zionist labor union), who was sabotaging the cooperation between Jews and Arab regarding the class struggle.

Alongside artistic representations of the workplace (a crane, a section of rail) and a sort of map of the country, there is a reference to the national conflict through the image of a prickly pear cactus that grows skulls instead of fruit. The purpose of the figures, the situations, and the performance of the winged donkey, as well as the complex class background, become clear when the visitor realized that the objects in the show are props and scenery for a satirical theater performance based on an eponymous play Toran has written. The play will be performed by the Theater Department of Tel Aviv University.

The show in Tel Aviv is typical of Toran's artistic practice, which he dedicates to social and political issues from around the world. Thus, in the past, he has presented a show that focused on the lives of workers in the meat industry in Chicago at the beginning of the 20th century. The inspiration for the show came from *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's book (1906).

Born in 1975, Toran lives and works in Rotterdam in the Netherlands and teaches at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, as well as in London and Geneva. He has had a solo show at MoMA in New York and participated in group shows in museums around the world. His works are in collections in Israel and elsewhere.

On a personal note: During my visit, I spoke with Noam Toran and with the show's curator, Leah Abir. I was pleased to learn from them that one of the sources of inspiration for the show has been my book *Between Dislocation and Exploitation* (2014), which is dedicated to the condition of the Arab hired workers and their struggles ever since the British Mandate.