Unione Sindacale di Base

Agricultural work, the EU's harsh call to Italy on the exploitation of migrants. USB: what does the government plan to do?



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The denunciation of the World Trade Union Federation, of which the USB is a member, on the inhumane situation of exploitation in which migrant workers live and work in the fields of Foggia, has produced its first, important effects. The Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament, chaired by the Swedish liberal Cecilia Wikström, has in fact written to the Italian government expressing serious concerns about the conditions of migrant workers, exposed to degradation and exploitation.

For this reason, Italy was strongly urged to take action to improve the situation of migrants, with particular regard to housing, access to water, hygiene, transport and social security. Not only that.

Unlike the usual procedure, the body of the European Parliament has decided to leave the petition open to verify the response of the Italian authorities, and has referred the problem to the European Commission. The European Commission has taken action with an hard letter to Italy in which it is recalled that the fight against exploitation at work, including that of migrants, remains a political objective and a priority not only of the Commission but of the entire EU. The European government recalls the obligation to guarantee migrant workers the same rights as Italian workers, including wages, safety and health. Furthermore, European directives provide that seasonal workers - as most workers are - have the right to housing that guarantees a decent standard of living. Finally, there is always the possibility of taking action - directly or through trade unions or non-governmental organisations - against employers, both in terms of wages and housing.

These are obligations which all Member States have a duty to enforce by ensuring that appropriate control bodies are set up. The EU Commission also recalls the punishability of employers who use irregular migrants, knowing their status, and the fact that workers are entitled to a residence permit for the duration of the proceedings against dishonest entrepreneurs. The letter from the EU Commission also highlights the existence of significant European funds for the integration and reception of migrants (AMIF, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund), and for agricultural development (EAFRD, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development), as well as the legislative project for the creation of a European Employment Authority (ELA), currently under discussion in the European Parliament.

So far, the response of European bodies to the demands of the World Trade Union Federation. The question that the Basic Union of Trade Unions addresses to the government - in the presence of news stories that constantly remind us of the existence of situations of exploitation on the verge of slavery in the Italian countryside - is: "How do you plan to implement immediately the measures to combat the exploitation of workers, especially in the light of the Security Decree, which instead gives a hand to the exploiters?"