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MONTREAL

## Exploited foreign workers to receive \$300,000 in damages from employment agency

The Canadian Press

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An employment agency in Victoriaville, Que., has been ordered to pay \$300,000 in damages for exploiting, threatening and psychologically harassing a group of Guatemalan farm workers. (File photo)

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MONTREAL -- An employment agency in Victoriaville, Que., has been ordered to pay \$300,000 in damages for exploiting, threatening and psychologically harassing a group of Guatemalan farmworkers, a Quebec labour tribunal has ruled.

The 11 men had come to work on a Quebec farm as part of the province's temporary foreign workers program. Their work permits allowed them to work for only one designated employer.

But soon after they arrived, they were recruited by the employment agency Entreprise de placement Les Progrès Inc., the owner of which enticed the men with an offer of better working conditions and a better salary, while maintaining that this change would also be legal for the men.

Some of the men only speak Spanish and do not know how to write or read, leaving them in a vulnerable position in a country that was unfamiliar to them, Judge France Giroux of Quebec's labour tribunal ruled.

In their complaint to the tribunal, the men alleged that they were psychologically harassed throughout their time working through the employment agency, saying they were housed in cramped, poorly heated lodging.

They said they were subject to false promises and other illegal acts, abusive and unpaid work hours - with shifts sometimes lasting 24 hours - were under excessive surveillance, had their private lives intruded upon, and were insulted and had their families threatened.

*This report by The Canadian Press was first published Oct. 23, 2019.*

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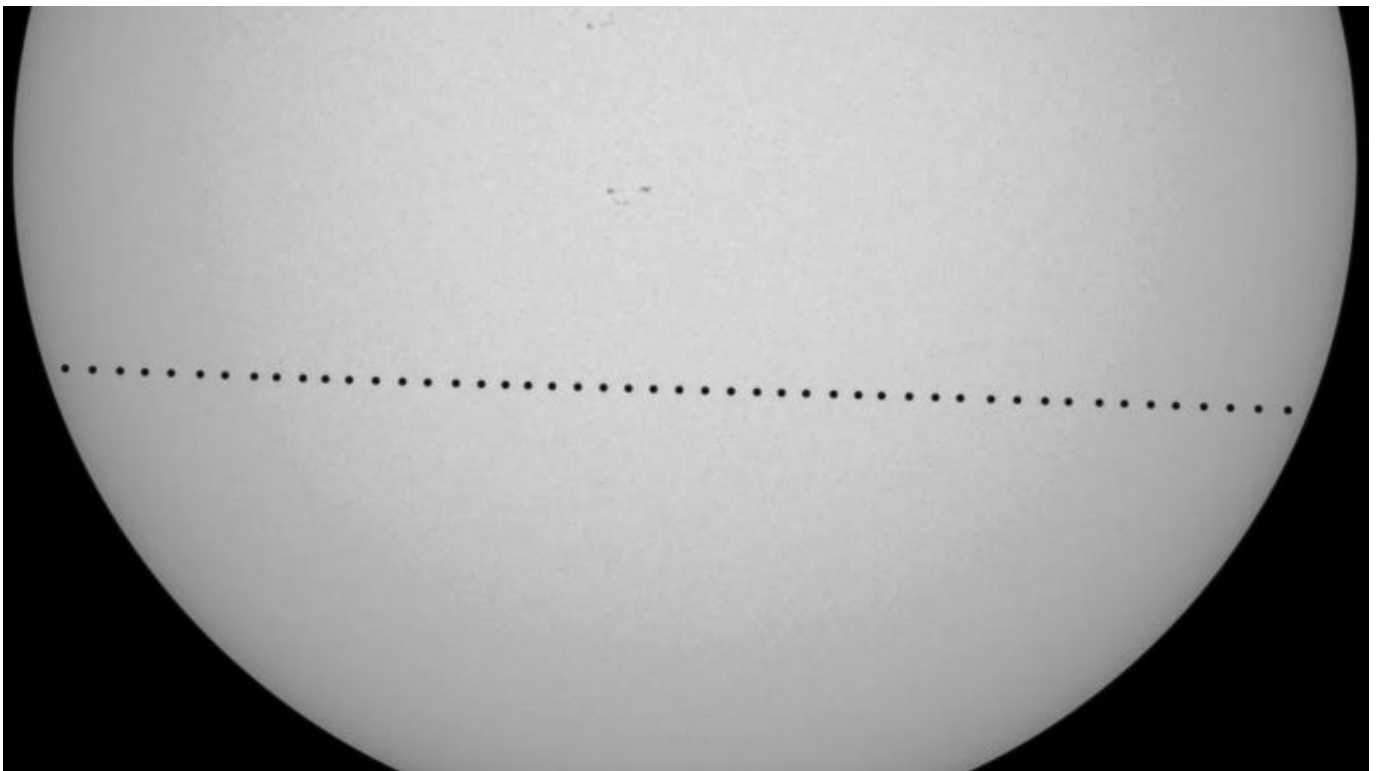
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