



# DOMESTIC WORKERS IN PIETERMARITZBURG

PACSA FACTSHEET

3

## 1976 SURVEY

Four years ago, Africa Enterprise conducted a survey among local churchgoers, which produced the following facts on domestic workers and their employers:

- \* Live-in maids are expected on average to work an 8 or 9 hour day, five days of the week. On the remaining two days they are regarded as partly on duty, and work between 4 and 5 hours.
- \* 7% of those questioned expected their worker to be fully on duty seven days a week.
- \* The average monthly wage for a live-in maid is R30. Only 3% of the employers questioned paid R50 per month.
- \* A live-out maid's earnings average out at 36c an hour - and this figure includes her transport costs to and from work.
- \* While 65% of employers are prepared to pay medical expenses, 8% actually deduct wages when the domestic is off sick.
- \* Only 14% of employers subscribed to a pension plan or savings account in the name of their employee.

## 1980 FIGURES

At a Drakensberg Administration Board workshop held on 10 March 1980, Mr Pascoe gave the following average starting wages for female domestic workers in Pietermaritzburg:

- live-in R35 per month
- live-out R50 per month (this includes busfare, which can amount to as much as R20 per month).

The Drakensberg Administration Board does *not* recommend these wages.

## HAVE WAGE RISES KEPT PACE WITH THE RISE IN THE COST OF LIVING?

Figure 1 shows that the cost of living rose 46.3% between 1976 and 1980. This is based on the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index (for all products) over this period.

Figure 1

| August 76 | January 80 | % Change |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| 177.4     | 259.5      | 46.3     |

[Source: Statistical News Release - 22 February 1980, Department of Statistics]

Figure 2 shows that wages of Pietermaritzburg domestic workers increased only 17.6% over a similar period.

Figure 2

| March 76 | March 80 | % Change |
|----------|----------|----------|
| R30      | R35      | 17.6     |

[Source: Comparison of Africa Enterprise and Drakensberg Board surveys]

These statistics seem to indicate that there has been an actual decline in the value of wages received by domestic workers in Pietermaritzburg over the last four years.

PACSA

PIETERMARITZBURG AGENCY FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL AWARENESS & ACTION  
P.O. BOX 2338, PIETERMARITZBURG 3200 / 174 BERG ST PIETERMARITZBURG  
TELEPHONE: 20052

## WHAT IS A LIVING WAGE?

The UNISA Bureau for Market Research has stated that the minimum living level in August 1976 for a black family of two adults and four children was R119.62 per month.

The *minimum living level* denotes "the minimum financial requirements of members of a household if they are to maintain their health and have acceptable standards of hygiene and sufficient clothing for their needs."

Allowing for the rise in the Consumer Price Index, the minimum living level in Pietermaritzburg in early 1980 would approximate R175.

## ARE DOMESTIC WORKERS FAMILY BREADWINNERS?

"It is often argued, in the case of Black women, that their wages can justifiably be kept low on the grounds that they are not the main breadwinners. Very often this is simply not true and women are indeed the main breadwinners, even the sole breadwinners."

[Source: Financial Mail, 24 October 1975]

Children of parents earning less than the minimum living level often suffer from diseases linked to malnutrition. (See PACSA FACTSHEET No 2 'Malnutrition in Natal')

## WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

The most obvious wage to pay a domestic worker is the minimum living level of about R175. But this is a far cry from R35 per month, and the unemployment figures are too shocking to add to them. A realistic minimum wage is needed.

## DWEP RECOMMENDS

The Domestic Workers and Employers Project (DWEP) recommends these *minimum* wages:

### *Live-in workers*

|             |   |        |                                           |
|-------------|---|--------|-------------------------------------------|
| unskilled   | - | R71.50 | per month (8 hour day, 44 hours per week) |
| skilled     | - | 85     | " " " " " " " " " "                       |
| housekeeper | - | 110    | " " " " " " " " " "                       |

*Live-out workers* - should receive, in addition to the above, her transport expenses, and an extra R10 per month to cover part of her rent.

*Daily worker* - R5 for a single 8 hour day, plus transport expenses. Someone working two 8 hour days a week should be paid R33 per month plus transport.

*Chars* - R1.10 per hour.

## ALTERNATIVES FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT AFFORD FULLTIME WORKERS

One answer to this problem is to continue to pay the same wage for fewer working hours. In her free time, the domestic may find ways of augmenting her salary by doing knitting, sewing, or piece work.

Another solution is to employ a daily worker for one or more days a week. She, too, may find other ways of earning. It will also enable her to have more time with her family.

"Such solutions are not easy, but they are a way of keeping your domestic worker without underpaying her."

[Source: DWEP 'Domestic Workers: Guide for Employers']

## BIBLICAL TEXTS

"Do what is right and fair; that pleases the LORD more than bringing him sacrifices."  
Proverbs 21:3

The following texts all deal with the just treatment of hired servants:

Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5; Job 7:1-2; James 5:4 .

Issued May 1980