



Saliem Patel, 13 November 2012

A Farm Worker's Wage:

R150 is not enough but it is a good place to start!

The farm workers in De Doorns are demanding R150 a day and embarked on strike action from the 5th November 2012. This demand is double the current pay which is determined by the Sectoral Determination for the farming sector. A Sectoral Determination (SD) is a legal instrument gazetted by the Minister of Labour to regulate wages and conditions in sectors where workers are very vulnerable and where there are no strong or representative organisations of workers and of employers to negotiate with each other. The amendment to the SD for the farming sector (SD 13) came into effect from March this year and only amended the wages of farm workers. The minimum wage set was: R7.71 an hour; R374.10 a week or R1 503.90 per month. In a household of five, the monthly wage would result in an average of R10 a day for a person to live on (slightly less than one Euro and slightly more than one Dollar at current exchange rates).

Below is a table that shows how wages have been determined by the SD 13 since March 2006. The table also calculates inflation over the period of the wage so that the real wage can be determined. An estimate of CPI for the current period of March 2012 to February 2013 is taken at 6.5% given that inflation is now on the rise again.

Year/s	Monthly Minimum Wage	Minimum Wage Increase	Minimum Wage Increase	Inflation Increase: Mar - Feb	Real Increase	Real Wage	Real Increase
	RANDS	RANDS	PERCENT	PERCENT	PERCENT	RAND	RAND
1 Mar 2006 - 28 Feb 2007	994.00			5.7			
1 Mar 2007 - 29 Feb 2008	1041.00	47.00	4.7	10.6	-1.0	984	-10
1 Mar 2008 - 28 Feb 2009	1090.00	49.00	4.7	8.6	-5.9	980	-61
1 Mar 2009 - 28 Feb 2010	1231.70	141.70	13.0	5.9	4.5	1 139	49
1 Mar 2010 - 28 Feb 2011	1316.69	84.99	6.9	3.7	3.2	1 271	39
1 Mar 2011 - 29 Feb 2012	1375.94	59.25	4.5	6.1	-1.6	1 295	-21
1 Mar 2012- 28 Feb 2013	1503.90	127.96	9.3	6.5	2.8	1 414	39
1 Mar 2006 - 29 Feb 2012		509.90	51.3	47.9	3.4	1 074	80

The table is informative because it shows that while nominal wages have rising from year to year there are at least three instances where the nominal percentage wage increase is below inflation resulting in a lower real wage. This means that there were three years when workers could actually afford to buy less than they were able to the previous year – they became poorer. In the period of March 2007 to February 2008, workers were R10 poorer than in the previous year. The following year they lost a further R61. Again in the year March 2011 to February 2012 they were R21 poorer than the previous year.

Between March 2006 and February 2012 the nominal wage of a farm worker increased by R509.90 but inflation over this period eroded most of this gain. The net result was a real increase of R80 over 6 years. The real monthly wage of a farm worker, therefore, increased by an average of R13.33 per annum during this period.

The conditions of employment in SD 13 are sub-standard. It condones a 45 hour working week and an additional 15 hours of overtime. It allows for unpaid maternity leave and for children between the ages of 15-18 to be employed. Paid annual leave amounts to about 15 days and sick leave of no more than 12 days per annum (36 days over three years). There is a maximum of 3 days per annum of family responsibility leave entitled to a farm worker when a child is sick or there is death in the family.

Numerous studies have documented the living and working conditions of farm workers' families. There is no doubt that democracy has not brought freedom to farm workers. While the end of Apartheid has opened up new markets for the industry allowing farmers to export and obtain foreign exchange, the majority of farm workers do not enjoy the right to assemble, the right to organise and the right to bargain – fundamental rights in a free society. Their living and working conditions are almost the same as they were under Apartheid. Poor education, high unemployment, hunger, lack of housing and healthcare are dominant characteristics of farm workers lives. If anything, work is more precarious due to the ability of farmers to source labour from other areas and other countries. Furthermore, workers remain prone to evictions from the only homes they know on the farms. That social protection from the state is inadequate and enforcement of rights by the Department of Labour is limited, farm workers remain at the mercy of farm owners and management. While solutions to the stubborn problem of apartheid's legacy remain elusive, the De Doorns farm workers realise that there can be no solution without them. They have begun the struggle to right the wrongs and raise the dignity of farm workers. While R150.00 a day is not enough, it is a good place to start. Below are minimum recommendations that would at least prove to farm workers that their dignity is important and that they have a role to play in the transformation of the farming sector and the economy of the country as whole.

Recommendations for urgent and immediate amendment to SD 13:

A fixed hourly rate of R20 an hour (this works out to R160 for an 8 hour day)

A 40 hour working week

Abolish work for children under the age of 18.

Fully paid maternity leave

Paid annual leave of 21 days

Annual legislated public hearings in every province open to all farm workers!

Knowledge is too important to be left in the hands of the bosses!!