

# OUTLOOK ON THE MONTH

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## DOMESTIC WAGES

*At a time when there are still cases of people being paid the unbelievable wage of R1.60 (plus food) for a month's work and, when R4.00 is not uncommon, it is essential for all those who are employers to re-examine themselves and to ask whether the wages they are paying are adequate. Domestic service is one area where those who wonder so often what they can do about the great problems of this country could make an important start. Clearly if one simply cannot afford to pay more it is better to employ somebody who wants a job than to leave him or her completely destitute. But at the same time one must bear in mind that the operation over so many years of such discriminatory legislation as the Land Act and the various pass laws means that 'going market wage' is less a result*

*of competitive forces than the product of the pressure, exerted in a particular way, of white power. Thus there is nothing inherently good or right about paying people the lowest wage that they are prepared (or compelled by force of circumstance) to accept. When seeking a guide as to what wage to pay it is surely as important to consider how much people need, simply in order to live, as to consider what the neighbours are paying. With this in mind we reprint below the substance of a pamphlet on the recommended minimum working conditions for domestic servants. The figures are based upon the cost of living in Johannesburg in recent years. Most of these costs are not significantly different in other parts of the country.*

### Working Conditions

A major grievance of domestics is that 'in the kitchens you do not have time', time to be alone, to intervisit and see people. Time to sit down and eat is also important. Some complain that they often have to eat 'at the sink'.

Working hours are generally too long. As each family has its own routine, working hours will have to be worked out in consultation with the maid.

Without being able to specify more closely we suggest:

- (a) a nine hour day
- (b) a fixed daily two hour break
- (c)  $1\frac{1}{2}$  days free per week
- (d)  $\frac{1}{2}$  day off on public holidays
- (e) 3 weeks annual paid leave
- (f) overtime payment for such as baby-sitting, at the rate of 20c an hour or the equivalent time off.

Employment ought to be regarded as any commercial employment with resulting commitment and benefits on both sides.

### Accommodation

The 'servant's room' is the employee's home away from home; and should be made attractive, comfortable and safe.

The minimum requirements for such a room should be:—

- \* a door which locks
- \* a window which opens, burglar proofing and curtains
- \* an electric light with shade
- \* a bed and mattress
- \* an easy chair
- \* a wardrobe or cupboard
- \* a table
- \* a carpet or linoleum floor covering
- \* an electric heater or stove with chimney
- \* a ceiling
- \* a toilet which works and a supply of toilet paper
- \* a shower or bath, in either case with hot and cold running water (or otherwise with hot water made available)
- \* a bell for safety, which can be rung from the maid's room.

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### Footnote:

The compilers of the pamphlet from which these extracts are taken are a group of Christians in Johannesburg who wish to promote the thrust of the 'Message to the People of South Africa' issued in the name of the South African Council of Churches in September, 1968. Copies of the pamphlet (25c. for 10) may be ordered from Mrs. Jean Tyacke, 33 Irma Street, Robertsham, Johannesburg.



## Wages

The cost of living for one female domestic receiving board and lodging, cleaning materials, fuel and light and working overalls free, calculated on the basis of minimum expenditure is estimated annually to be:—

### Clothing 32.33

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| 3 dresses (cotton)    | 7.50 |
| 2 pairs shoes         | 5.50 |
| 1 skirt               | 2.50 |
| 1 jersey or cardigan  | 2.50 |
| 2 petticoats (cotton) | 2.50 |
| Rainwear              | 2.00 |
| 1 blouse              | 1.99 |
| 1 coat (for 3 years)  | 1.67 |
| 1 nightgown           | 1.29 |
| 2 brassiers           | 1.18 |
| 2 pairs bloomers      | .98  |
| 2 head scarves        | .98  |
| 2 vests               | .90  |
| 2 pairs stockings     | .84  |

### Chemist 11.75

|                          |      |
|--------------------------|------|
| 2 face and 2 hand creams | 2.60 |
| 6 pkts. sanitary towels  | 1.80 |
| 6 tooth-paste            | 1.50 |
| 2 deodorants             | 1.05 |
| 2 bottles aspirin        | 1.00 |
| 4 vaseline               | 1.00 |
| 3 small fruit salts      | .90  |
| 2 brylcreams             | .70  |
| 1 tooth-brush            | .40  |
| 2 lip-ice                | .30  |
| 1 cough syrup            | .30  |
| 1 bottle vapo-rub        | .20  |

### Travelling 24.16

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1 church visit weekly                         | 10.40 |
| 2 visits to rural home<br>(near Johannesburg) | 8.00  |
| 2 town visits per month                       | 2.88  |
| 3 hospital visits                             | 2.88  |

### Other 76.27

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Entertainment—visitors, dances, parties                    | 24.00 |
| 1 transistor radio and batteries<br>(R50 over 5 yrs.)      | 10.00 |
| Gifts  | 6.00  |
| Savings  | 6.00  |
| Consultations—Doctors,<br>Dentists and Medicines           | 6.00  |
| Radio Licence  | 5.50  |
| Church dues  | 4.80  |
| Funeral Insurance  | 4.08  |
| Meals out (twice per month)                                | 3.60  |
| Reading Materials  | 2.40  |
| 2 blankets (R7), pillow (75c)<br>to last 6 yrs. and sheets |       |

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| (R2.50) to last four years | 1.94 |
| Drycleaning—coat and skirt | 1.20 |
| 1 towel                    | .75  |

Total annual personal expenses R144.51

### Monthly R12.00

Our survey reveals that on an average each maid has four dependents viz. mother, 2 children of school-going age and 1 child of pre-school age. On an average 76% of the minimum expenses for food, clothing and schooling are paid by the maid, leaving the remaining household expenses of R38.15 to be paid by her husband or other breadwinner.

The following monthly expenses for the above four dependents are taken from research statistics of the Non-European Affairs Department of the Johannesburg City Council published in June, 1969.

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Food      | 22.45 |
| Clothing  | 6.01  |
| Schooling | 2.17  |

R30.63

76% of R30.63 23.00

Personal expenses 12.00

**Recommended Monthly Wage** R35.00

### Relationships

**Ubuntu:** means compassion, humanity, human relationships. Ubuntu is important in any human situation. It covers:

**Respect:** treat domestic employees with the respect due to any human being.

**Culture:** to know the African traditional polite behaviour helps prevent misunderstanding. The customs include, for example, looking directly at the face, sitting down when speaking to a superior, going first through a door or gate.

**Feelings:** realise that the maid, like any person is sensitive and feels hurt by abuse particularly if it is shouted and repetitive. Too often she is spoken *about*, not *to*, in her presence. Furthermore to an African, increased age means increased respect; do not call an adult 'boy' or 'girl'. Such terms offend in the same way as do the words 'native', 'munt', 'kaffir'.

**Identity:** every human being must feel that he or she is an individual—you can help your domestic employee by taking an interest in her problems, her family life and position in African society, by realising what she finds important and by acknowledging her strength and accepting and learning to understand and help her in her weaknesses. To know her surname, home address and home conditions shows concern as does the inviting her husband or family to see where she works.

**Praise:** how much more enjoyable is life with a little praise for a job well done.