

"The minimum amount that a worker should receive in cash for services rendered during a day's work," and also that "it should suffice to cover a family wage-earner's normal material, social and cultural needs, including mandatory education for his children."

This was the spirit of the law present in wage negotiations since 1965, the year when minimum wages were first enacted in response to demands made by the labor movement. At the time, Mexico wasn't plagued by its present-day economic and financial troubles. The minimum wage climbed steadily over the next ten years, the only period in history during which Mexican worker's basic income, and real purchasing power, actually increased.

The trend was reversed in 1976, and by 1982 the deteriorating purchasing

power of wages became the central problem the Mexican working class faced. By the first quarter of 1986 the real value of the minimum wage had fallen to its lowest level in 21 years, and an 80% wage-increase would have been necessary to recover the purchasing power worker's had in 1977.

The falling value of wages led the National Minimum Wage Commission, which gathers worker, employer and government representatives, to begin meeting on a yearly basis instead of every two years as had been the case. As of 1985 the Commission meets every six months to analyze the situation and set the mandatory increase in the minimum wage.

Thus, the minimum wage increased 32% on the first of the year, and in June it climbed an additional 25%, meaning that workers who

Minimum Wages no Longer Satisfactory

With the current inflation rate, "survival" is no longer an abstract concept but a day-to-day reality for working-class Mexicans.

The new minimum wage which will be in force at least until next December, was decreed last June 1st. Current legislation on the matter defines this wage as



Despite the slogans, the worst of the recession is not yet over.

earn this minimum currently receive about 61,000 pesos a month, approximately \$90.

The basic expenditures of an average six-member working class family with this level of income are on food and lodging, and to a lesser extent on clothing, recreation, health and education. The state covers some of these needs, education for example, to a certain extent.

no longer afford them. Fish and meat, for example, are substituted with pasta soup and eggs, milk is replaced by coffee or tea. This, of course, is detrimental to their nutrition.

The 5 million-member Confederation of Mexican Workers, the CTM, believes that one important measure to reactivate the economy is to increase the real value of

power falls, important areas of the internal market shrink, and this in turn affects investment." In other words: nobody will be interested in producing if there are no consumers.

Fidel Velazquez, the CTM's main leader, believes companies should increase their volume of production and sales instead of resorting to higher prices for reduced sales volumes. This, of course, on the premise that a satisfactory wage will be granted.

A high percentage of Mexican workers are not organized, and this limits their ability to develop alternative protective mechanisms. Some even have a hard time getting employers to pay the mandatory minimum wage. Organized workers, on the other hand, often negotiate wages above the minimum and obtain additional services in housing and transportation, low-priced basic goods and severance pay and pensions that are higher than the law requires. These conditions are worked out

between employers and the union, and are written up in a Collective Bargaining Pact.

Yet the minimum wage is still the basis for measuring the quality of life for Mexican workers in general. The Mexican people's struggle in defense of our country's sovereignty and independence, is complemented by the struggle to increase the worker's welfare.

Mexico will have the capacity to meet its foreign debt payments only if it reactivates its economy without losing sight of the social aspects of development. If these terms are not met, the country will be forced to adopt unilateral measures, and will have labor's firm support if this is the case.

Further reductions in their real wages are unacceptable to Mexican workers. "The weight of the crisis must be equitably borne," say their leaders. ★

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Photo by Miguel Antonio Gen Latina.