

NATION

# Bittersweet reactions to minimum wage increases

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THE announcement of new minimum wages has brought bittersweet reactions from farm and domestic worker unions and activists, who say many are still living below the poverty line.

From March 1 the minimum wage will be increased to R21.69 per hour for the majority of employees, including farm labourers. Domestic workers will be paid R19.09 per hour as a minimum and extended public works government workers will be paid R11.93 per hour.

Black Agricultural Workers Union of South Africa (Bawusa) president Nosey Pieterse, said he was “disgusted” by the increase.

“First the government took away the top-up social grants, then

the Covid relief was also removed. On the other end farmers are looking at how they can introduce short-time – it’s a double-edged sword for workers. In many cases these are the only people working in their homes, how are they supposed to live on this? The government has done an injustice to the poor,” he said.

Farmworker activist Billy Claasen, added that some workers were still not even paid the minimum. “It’s not good but we welcome it, there are still many workers who don’t even get this. We want the labour department to enforce farmers to pay their workers’ right,” said Claasen.

Domestic worker unions were not happy that their increases were lower. Pinky Mashiane, United Domestic Workers of South Africa (Udwosa) founder said: “We are

still being discriminated because we are still behind other workers. We want to see the same minimum wage for everyone. This is not a living wage. I feel happy for those who are still being underpaid but will employers comply?” she asked.

Mashiane aimed to empower domestic workers with negotiation skills.

Myrtle Witbooi, general secretary for the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (Sadsawu) said they will be writing to the Labour Minister, Thulas Nxesi about their dissatisfaction.

“Although we are in a way satisfied, it adds an increment of R450 to the monthly income, we still feel domestic workers are disadvantaged. Everything goes up yet we are still lagging behind at the bottom of ladder. We made

submissions when it was open for public comment but it seems those submissions were not taken into account.”

She said their campaign focus for the year would be on bringing domestic worker wages on par with other workers.

Meanwhile, the South African Parastatal and Tertiary Institutions Union (Saptu) said all farmers would not be in a position to pay increases. Department of Labour and Employment spokesperson, Thembinkosi Mkalipi said: “The increase is as a result of the requirement of the National Minimum Wage Act which stipulates that the Minimum Wage must be reviewed annually. The law further requires that the commission must strive to equalise the minimum wage for farm workers with the Minimum wage of other workers.”