

DOMESTIC WORK IS SLAVERY

Elizabeth Tshayinca and her daughter Elsie Mbatha have both worked as domestic workers for many years. Elsie has also worked in a factory and now plans to earn her living as a hawker.

Elizabeth works for one employer and commutes daily between Soweto and Johannesburg. Elsie works part-time for a number of employers.

Here Elizabeth and Elsie talk about their lives as domestic workers.

ELIZABETH: Oh, I've been doing domestic work for more than fifty years. Count the years from eleven to sixty-six: it's fifty-five years. I was eleven years old when I started work for this family and I used to look after the little girl - earning a pound a month. That's how I started.

Before, I was a live-in domestic. I did that for a long time, until I had five or six children. My mother looked after the children.

It's worse when you live in. No rest, day and night. If they go out at night they want you to come and sit with their children. No pay for that, you see.

ELSIE: Domestic work! You earn peanuts - even when you do a part-time job.

ELIZABETH: You know what, you can work part-time and earn more. But you work hard. You can't say yesterday I scrubbed cupboards, today I'm not scrubbing cupboards. I must scrub cupboards today because I'm doing this job only for that day. That means you've always got to have that full strength to work every day.

ELSIE: When you do a part-time job maybe you come once or twice a week, or once or twice a month. That job will be a whole month's job. You must do it in one day. You do the fridge, you do the stove, do the windows - and you must finish it in one day. Ayi khona! I'm not a machine.

The employer says you've got one hour for lunch. But there's no hour: Instead of sitting down and eating your food, you're rushing to finish this job. You don't even chew nicely - you're just rushing

to swallow because you're watching the time.

You get up early, you go to work early - but you come home late. That's what makes people unhappy about domestic work. It's slavery.

I cook for my husband. He's tired from work, lifting up heavy boxes and iron. Sometimes we come in at the same time. He wants his tea. He'll sit down with the paper. You'll be a 'girl' again in the house. He is the boss reading the paper. And that makes you fed up. By the time you go to sleep you're tired.



You've had no time to sit down and talk to him, or listen to the radio, or watch T.V. You must wash up and go to bed. That's when you relax.

I've been selling fruit and veggies at the station in Soweto. I make from R10 to R40 a day. But I've stopped because I'm waiting for a licence. The inspectors worry us and we get caught. It's hard to get a licence. They make you dance in their offices for a long time before they give you one.

If I can get this licence I'll stop working because I can see where there's money. Any time, any day, I'll stop working.

DOMESTIC WORKER ORGANISATIONS

In South African law domestic workers are not recognised as workers, and this means that there is no law forcing employers to abide by decent conditions of work and reasonable pay for domestic workers. Domestic worker organisations are busy fighting for this to be changed.

South African Domestic Workers Association (SADWA) in Joburg, Cape Town and Durban, Domestic Workers Association (DWA) in Cape Town, Domestic Workers Association of South Africa in Port Elizabeth, East London Domestic Workers Union (ELDWU), and National Domestic Workers Union (NDWU) are all organisations of domestic workers. Representatives of these organisations recently met together to talk about forming one organisation. At this meeting they also worked out some minimum demands, so that domestic workers can fight against being treated like slaves. Here are some of them:

- * R150 a month for semi-skilled, and R200 for skilled work.
- * An 8-hour day, 5-day working week for all full-time domestic workers, whether they live in townships or as 'live-in' domestic workers.
- * Overtime pay at R2.50 an hour.
- * Part-time domestic work rate at R2.50 an hour.
- * All travelling expenses should be paid for by employers.
- * Benefits, like maternity leave, pension, paid public holidays, sick leave, UIF, and medical aid for domestic workers.

Here are some addresses of domestic worker organisations in Durban:

SADWA
5 Ecumenical Centre
20 St Andrew's Street
Durban Tel: 318322

NDWU
15 Ecumenical Centre
20 St Andrew's Street
Durban Tel: 3016103

Both of these organisations are part of the newly-formed trade union federation, COSATU. They can put you in touch with domestic worker organisations in other parts of the country.

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