



picture of courtesy of the Financial Mail

eration of the farmer it is very difficult for workers to claim this. Payments based on a formula which includes the wage as one factor are often very small, eg a worker who was earning R20 per month in 1980 had his hand severed in a reaping machine and received R329 in compensation.

Certain occupational hazards of farming such as insecticide poisoning are notifiable diseases. In 1985 fewer than 100 cases were notified and yet it is common to see farm workers spraying crops without any form of protective clothing. Without some form of enforcement agency legislation remains little more than useless pieces of paper to farm workers.

— without access to registered trade unions

While it is not illegal for farm workers to join trade unions, such unions cannot be registered, as farm workers are not classified as employees under the relevant legislation. Access to farm workers by people such as union organisers is strictly limited by the readiness of farmers to invoke the trespass laws. Until farm workers can organise freely it is unlikely that they are going to win better conditions, eg fixed working hours including lunch and tea breaks, overtime pay, annual leave, etc. It is possible though that the extension of the kind of advice offices run by the Black Sash in urban areas into rural areas would be one way of assisting people to obtain the rights to which they are entitled.

What is the State doing about the plight of farm labourers?

— sitting on the National Manpower Commission!

RIG makes an urgent plea for the commission to make recommendations which will put an end to feudal labour conditions on farms — and in houses.

In 1974 the repeal of the Masters and Servants Act was greeted enthusiastically. But because the Act was not replaced by any legal protection, farm and domestic workers are now subject only to the common law. Then in February 1982 the National Manpower Commission enquiry into wages and working conditions of farm and domestic workers was established. The report of this commission, 'to investigate possible measures for the regulation of the conditions of employment of farm and domestic workers', has not been published four years later. It is a matter of the greatest urgency and public concern. The report should be released without further delay.

Unless this report recommends livable minimum wages, eligibility for the Unemployment Insurance Fund, provisions for sick and annual paid leave, paid public holidays and Sundays, overtime, protective legislation for children and pregnant women, and the freedom to organise and bargain collectively, it will perpetuate the feudal labour conditions on the farms and in the homes of this country. In fact, these workers and their families do not even have the security of tenure of the feudal system — at a moment's notice they may be evicted from land where they have lived for generations.

Even if all these provisions are written into the legislation, the plight of farm and domestic workers will improve little unless adequate and effective measures for the implementation and monitoring of the laws are clearly laid out.

Until farmworkers' trade unions organise nationally, a network of advice offices throughout the rural areas is an urgent necessity. Farmworkers need advice and possible legal representation in the case of unfair dismissals, evictions, assaults, theft of their stock, refusal of old age pensions, workmen's compensation, amongst other problems.

Farmworkers are more seriously disadvantaged than urban or mine workers as they work in small groups, far from each other and urban contacts. Even those who are literate seldom get to see newspapers or pamphlets. Transport is irregular and expensive. Access to telephones is an unknown luxury. The only contact is through the church and schools. Because priests and bona fide religious representatives are allowed to visit the farms, responsibility rests heavily with the churches (and teachers) to assist farmworkers with their problems. The not insignificant labour reforms introduced in the rest of South Africa over the past five years must be extended to farm and domestic workers.