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## Notes On Declining Standard Of Living Majority Of Mexican Workers

*by Steven Ranieri*

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According to a recent study by researchers of the National Autonomous University (UNAM) and the National Consumer Institute (INCO), although Mexicans are working harder and more hours per week on average than in the early 1980s, food consumption and purchasing power are below early 1980s levels. Unemployment is up, and the size of the "informal sector" is increasing. In the past three years, the four principal indicators of wealth distribution employment, social welfare spending, wages and salaries as proportion of GDP, and real income have declined, result of economic policies implemented by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration. INCO statistics show that the poorest sectors of society have experienced the greater proportional decline in living standards in the three-year period, seen mainly in reduced quality and quantity of food consumption. INCO survey results show no substantive improvement in consumption by low-income households accompanying rising incidence of female and child labor force participation; and, a 30% reduction in food purchases. Most low-income households consume only seven basic foodstuffs: tortillas, white bread, eggs, milk, beans, oil and sugar. INCO described 42 million Mexicans as "impoverished." Of that number, 16 million live in "extreme poverty." Over the past decade, average real wages have declined by about 60%. About half of the deterioration occurred in the last three years alone. Between November 1987 and November 1990, the real minimum wage level has dropped by 29.9%. The basic food basket used to calculate the consumer price index is now beyond the purchasing capacity of households earning the equivalent of two or less minimum wages per month. The "superbasic" basket, comprised of only the most basic foodstuffs and nothing more, at present costs 18,000 pesos per day, compared to the average national minimum wage of 12,000 pesos per day. Fifty-five percent of the Mexican labor force earns the equivalent of 0.8 to 3.5 minimum wages per month. (Source: El Financiero, 02/27/91)

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