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Left MP loses 2kg after week on living wage, after sinking millionaire minister who set it



A pasta dish. © Global Look Press / Hauke-Christian Dittrich

A regional MP in Russia lost 2kg in one week while trying to survive on a living wage. The experiment follows a scandal which cost the job of the minister who set the wage and defended her decision in a rather insensitive way.

The career-killing scandal over the living wage in Russia's Saratov Region started in mid-October when Nikolay Bondarenko, an MP from the Communist Party,

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challenged the region’s then-labor minister, Natalya Sokolova. He asked whether she would be prepared to eat on 3,700 rubles (about \$56) a month, after proposing this amount as part of a law setting the minimum living wage for non-working pensioners.

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Ex-Labor Minister Natalya Sokolova. ©Saratov region labor ministry

The minimum living wage is a more or less technical term in Russia, upon which various subsidies and amount of pension depends; setting it in a way that doesn’t run the region’s budget into a deficit is a serious task.

But the minister fell into the opposition MP’s trap, and started arguing that a person can survive on that amount for some time before finding additional income, and that it was no different from a religious fast. But she personally refused to live on the meager amount as an experiment.

The video of a smug-looking Sokolova saying that her “*ministerial status does not allow*” her to take part in the experiment and that “*macaroni cost is always low*” was published online and resulted in public outrage.

While some media outlets made up [mock menus](#) full of

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the minister was sacked.

Meanwhile Bondarenko, who gained a lot of publicity while performing the character assassination, took up the experiment and says he is trying to stay within the \$56 budget for groceries. After the first week, he says he feels relatively OK – even though he lost 2kg, – but has found it hard to eat more or less the same things every day.

“That was not the best week of my life. By the last two days I was out of vegies and chicken and only had some groats. The prices turned out to be higher than official statistics suggested, so I failed to buy more,” he [told](#) RIA Novosti.

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pasta for the minister, others dug into her finances and discovered that her annual income of [millions](#) of rubles and ownership of a large suburban house didn't stop her from [applying](#) for aid from the region's budget. Within days,

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