



Hunger being driven away at the EPN Food Drive

The food drive, which was underway March 21st-25th, has been a huge success! It was held at Les Galeries du Parc, just outside of the Metro grocery store, at Park Avenue and Prince-Arthur Street.

Generous individuals from the downtown area bought extra non-perishable food items while doing their grocery shopping, and donated them to our cause! All food items collected are being donated to the Old Brewery Mission. A big thank you goes out to the organizer of this event, Chris Connolly, as well as everyone who lent a hand, either by tabling or contributing!



Two of our faithful volunteers!

Left to right: Gillian Murphy & Christopher Connolly

EPN hosts NGO leader from Bolivia

On March 21st, End Poverty Now had the wonderful opportunity of hosting a guest speaker all the way from Bolivia. Alejandrina Ibanez is the director of a Bolivian NGO called CISTEM that works to combat poverty in El Alto, Bolivia. Ms. Ibanez, through the help of a translator, led an animated discussion, outlining some of the sources of poverty in Bolivia, as well as what the government and

the people are doing to raise themselves up out of abject poverty. EPN would like to thank Ms. Ibanez for making time for us on her busy trip, as well as Mika Kissenkoetter, who did a wonderful job translating! For more information about CISTEM, please visit www.cistem.net.

(Correction to February newsletter: Alejandrina Ida should read Alejandrina Ibanez – we apologize for this mistake).

Podcasts are here!

On your way to class, take a break from listening to the latest *Arcade Fire* album, and instead, load up your ipod with EPN's own podcasts! Our first two podcasts have already been uploaded to the world wide web - to download, simply visit the EPN website at www.endpoverty.ca!

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ENDPOVERTYNOW

Despite the weather, another successful EPN concert



Bands Broadcast Radio, Chambre, and To The Sound Of My Voice sang their sweet tunes at EPN's March concert

Above: Nick Backovic, lead singer for Broadcast Radio

On Friday March 16th, End Poverty Now hosted our second benefit concert of the year at Les Saints Showbar. Faithful EPN members and strangers alike braved the late-season snowstorm to enjoy the music of bands *To the sound of my voice*, *Chambre*, and *Broadcast Radio*. Money raised will help to fund EPN's summer internship and grassroots initiatives! A big thanks goes out to all those who lent a hand!

Test your knowledge of poverty issues with the EPN poverty quiz!

1. At the start of the 21st century, about _____ many people, globally, lived in abject poverty.
 - a. 1.2 million
 - b. 12 million
 - c. 120 million
 - d. 1.2 billion
2. How many people go to bed hungry each night?
 - a. 8 million
 - b. 80 million
 - c. 800 million
 - d. 8 billion
3. How many people die each year from poverty related causes?
 - a. 5,000
 - b. 50,000
 - c. 500,000
 - d. 1 billion
4. What is the UN target for foreign aid that is supposed to be established by 2015?
 - a. 0.1% GDP
 - b. 0.7% GDP
 - c. 1% GDP
 - d. 7% GDP
5. Canada currently contributes ____% of our GDP to foreign aid.
 - a. 0.33
 - b. 0.70
 - c. 0.85
 - d. 1.00
6. In _____ the House of Commons unanimously resolved to eliminate poverty among Canadian children, a promise that has still not been kept.
 - a. 1989
 - b. 1993
 - c. 1999
 - d. 2004
7. At the start of the year 2000, _____ Canadian children lived in poverty.¹
 - a. 100,000
 - b. 500,000
 - c. 1 million
 - d. 5 million
8. This celebrity musician has dedicated much of his life to global equality and poverty eradication.
 - a. Paul McCartney
 - b. Kid Rock
 - c. Bono
 - d. 50 cent
9. Montreal has one of the highest urban poverty rates in Canada. As of 2000, ____% of Montreal residents receive welfare.
 - a. 6
 - b. 12
 - c. 18
 - d. 24
10. End Poverty Now is:
 - a. An organization dedicated to the long-term struggle against abject poverty in Canada.
 - b. An organization started by students who want to make a difference.
 - c. An organization incorporated by the Canadian Federal Government.
 - d. Somewhere you can make a difference!!!
 - e. All of the above.

Answers on page 4

¹ The information and facts from questions 1-7 came from www.makepovertyhistory.ca

Upcoming EPN events!

Elections

EPN is about to celebrate its first birthday! And you know what this means...it's time for elections! The members of End Poverty Now's Board of Directors are democratically elected...by YOU! In order to vote, you must be an active member of EPN, which means that you have to have attended at least TWO meetings (subcommittee or general) in the last 3 months. It is very important for our members to have a voice in this matter, so please come out to the general meeting on March 28th at 7 PM in the AUS lounge (McGill campus) to vote! If you are unsure if you are eligible to vote, you can contact secretary@endpovertynow.ca. For more information about the positions on the Board of Directors, visit www.endpovertynow.ca.

Internship Opportunities

A large part of EPN's mandate is to coordinate grassroots development projects with NGOs in Canada and abroad. We have 2-3 projects that we will be funding this year, in India, Nepal, and Rwanda. The catch: for every project, we need an intern to work with the NGO we are funding. This means that there are several internship positions available for members of EPN! The deadline to apply is April 1st. For more information, visit www.endpovertynow.ca/internships.html.

The EPN MONTHLY is a newsletter produced by the members of the Publications Committee of *End Poverty Now*:

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Monica Lafon

End Poverty Now is an organization that is dedicated to the long-term battle against abject poverty. Born out of the international Make Poverty History campaign, *End Poverty Now* represents a group of dedicated individuals, mainly students, who want to make a difference in the world through working to end abject poverty. For more information on how to get involved with *End Poverty Now*, email info@endpovertynow.ca.

As politicians debate the minimum wage, theatre casts the working poor

—MONICA LAFON—

"To appraise a society, examine its ability to be self-correcting. When grievous wrongs are done or endemic suffering exposed, when injustice is discovered or opportunity denied, watch the institutions of government and business and charity. Their response is an index of a nation's health and of a people's strength."

— Barbara Ehrenreich
Nickel and Dime

With the up-coming provincial elections in Quebec, there is no better time than now to follow Ehrenreich's advice and watch our government. This year, one party in particular – Quebec Solidaire – has brought poverty to the forefront of their agenda, with spokesperson Françoise David proposing an increase in minimum wage to \$10 per hour.

Is this good or bad news?

Although Statistics Canada does not define an official "poverty line," there are several ways in which the government tends to analyze low income. The first is an analysis in relative terms, called Low Income Cut-offs (LICO), which identifies those who are worse off than the average. Being below the LICO does not necessarily indicate that one is poor, per se, but rather that one is poorer than the average Canadian. In addition to the LICO, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Social Development Research and Information has established a more absolute measure: a Market Basket Measure (MBM). This method aims to objectively calculate the amount of income needed to buy a specific basket of goods and services – such as quantities and qualities of food, clothing, shelter and transportation.

According to Eric Shragge, Director of the Graduate Diploma in Community Economic Development at Concordia University, raising minimum wage by \$2.25 per hour is not enough. If someone were to work eight hours a day at \$10 per hour, he or she would have an annual income of \$20,800, which would fall below the LICO after taxes.

Shragge pointed out that even if a person has a full-time job, they may still be poor, because wages are inadequate or well-paid jobs unavailable. Employers often oppose hikes in minimum wage because it forces them to pay more in the end, but according to Shragge, this may not be such a bad thing. He emphasized that despite economic growth in the last decade, wages have not increased, whereas profits have. "It is time to rebalance that a little bit," he recommended.

How can we compare this situation to the U.S agenda?

Since 1997, the federal minimum wage in the United States had been frozen at \$5.15, but it now stands at \$7.25 after the House of Representatives and the Senate came to an agreement over the much-debated federal minimum wage bill. The Bush Administration supported the Senate's proposal to increase the minimum wage and provide tax relief for small businesses, believing this would help produce both a strong labour market and a favourable environment for small businesses.

But are there better alternatives?

In Thomas Z. Freedman's article for The Washington Post, he stated that a better solution would be to not only increase wages, but also apply an earned-income tax credit that would guarantee an income above the poverty line. As Freedman himself says, "You may not be rich, but you'll know that in America, work pays." He also mentioned that the budget reflects the nation's priorities, suggesting there should be a redistribution of resources to benefit low-income workers.

So how can we, as citizens, approach these recent concerns?

Believe it or not, through theatre.

This month, Joan Holden's adaptation of the bestseller "Nickel and Dime" has been a success in theatres across the United States. The production portrays the experiences of undercover journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, as she tried to live on minimum wage by working as a waitress, hotel maid and Wal-Mart employee.

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Photo exhibit looks into your backyard



When one thinks about poverty, often images remote to Canada come to mind: children in the rural villages of Africa, women working in the slums of South Asia, or farmers in the fields of South America. But poverty knows no borders. You need not travel abroad to

find its devastating effects; simply look in your own backyard.

EPN's photo exhibit, "Poverty in our Backyard", which took place from March 10th-21st at McGill University, was produced with the intent of presenting the realities of poverty in Montreal.



Taking on a challenge, making a difference

—HEATHER CRAY—

Ecuador. For most people, the name evokes images of mountain ranges, the Galapagos Islands, and the rainforest. For me and the twelve other students participating in “International Co-op, Ecuador 2005,” on the other hand, the experience was very different.

We were warned that the February 2005 program would be intensive (meaning we would be trapped in the same classroom for 10 hours a day, 5 days a week), so we began preparing as soon as the school year started. However, aside from the frenzied packing and fundraising – as well as the shots, TB tests, and blood tests – we had a lot of fun. Then, before we knew it, came the moment of truth: we were on our way to a whole other world.

I was housed with a lower-middle class host family for three and a half months. Lower-middle class meant that the water was always cold, but the house was made of concrete and the window frames weren’t quite sealed. It was wonderful. My host family – an amazing group of people with whom I am still in contact – adopted me almost immediately, chores and all. In fact, once my host mother discovered that I could carry my weight in groceries (thank goodness for martial arts training), my Sundays were spent at

the market, hauling fresh produce around for the small grocery store on the bottom level of the house – a common way of subsidizing farm or business income.

The rest of the week, and any free time, was spent working on projects for my job placement. My official title was “assistant public school teacher,” but the reality was quite different: four classrooms, sometimes four teachers, and not a word of English spoken. The school system in the province of Pichincha is rather two-tiered, with government-funded schools receiving the bulk of the student body, but representing less than half of the classes. The wealthy (and government officials) would never dream of sending their children to a school like the one I worked at, mainly because of the catch-22 situation that existed: in order to pass a grade in high school, a child must complete every course. However, English, computers, geography and music are rarely taught due to a lack of funds. Effectively, this means that very few (if any) students attending my school would get much beyond where their parents started out.

While teaching the kindergarten/grade 1 class three days a week, I realized that almost half of my grade 1 students could not read or write. To make matters worse, their parents were illiterate – meaning

they had no hope of help at home – so I started up a reading-buddy program. Once my Spanish developed a bit, I began teaching music theory and recorder to all of the grades (you can guess where the majority of my spending money went), and also started teaching basic English. The geography program, which I ran during lunch hours when I wasn’t cooking, was small but beneficial as many of my students had never seen a world map before. As challenging as it sounds, the smiling faces of my students made every second worth it.

Would I do it again? In a heartbeat. The experience not only defined my life, but also determined the career path that I am currently pursuing. The pictures that my students gave me the day I left still adorn my walls at home. Would I recommend it? You get ill, homesick, frustrated, challenged, and pushed beyond your limit, so in a word: yes. It’s not for everyone, but if you’re interested there are plenty of opportunities to explore other cultures while making a difference in the world.

Answers to EPN quiz

1-D	3-B	5-A	7-C	9-B
2-C	4-B	6-A	8-C	10-E

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Most of the productions have been done by University student theatres, such as the Department of Theatre at the University of Nebraska Omaha, which opened their spring season with Holden’s work. After the performances, students took their support for this issue one step further by passing out flyers about minimum wage laws and by holding interactive feedback sessions with the director, designers and cast.

The play was also cast at the University of Wisconsin-Manitowoc, Spontaneous Theatre Productions in Idaho, the Weshoff Theatre of Illinois State University, and the Unicorn Theatre in Kansas City. While the show was playing at the

Unicorn Theatre, the Kansas City Star ran a section of interviews with the actors about their own experiences working low-wage jobs. Additionally, a local radio station broadcasted an interview with Holden, which discussed the connection between the play and the current debate about the country’s minimum wage laws in Congress.

This play has accomplished what, in an increasingly apathetic voting population, so many others have failed to do: make citizens reflect upon the laws that a country has established. With the upcoming election here in Quebec, we have a chance to use democracy to put the issues that we think are important on the agenda. When the time comes to vote,

think of our nation’s health, as Ehrenreich so eloquently said. It is in our hands...

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