

POOR NO MORE



A film about the problems and prospects of the working poor

By **David Langille**, Executive Producer

Imagine a world without poverty: where people do not have to beg, where housing is affordable and university education is free. When it is clear that they also enjoy prosperous economies, the natural question to ask is, “If other countries can reduce poverty, why don’t we?”

That is the premise of *Poor No More*, a feature documentary about Canada’s working poor, hosted by Canadian film and television star Mary Walsh.

CANADA’S WORKING POOR

The film takes an engaging look at why so many Canadians are stuck in low paying jobs with no security and no future. Audiences are gripped by the stories of Vicki and Durval, who are two of many whom you will meet in the film.

Vicki Baier enjoyed a comfortable middle class lifestyle in a small Ontario town until her husband died. Then it got a lot harder to make ends meet. Her job as a cashier with the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) did not offer her enough hours to support herself and her 16-year-old daughter. Although she had worked there for 12 years, she could not get full-time work, which meant she did not get health or disability benefits. Therefore, when she got breast cancer she had to keep working and arrange treatments during her breaks. Meanwhile, her employer enjoyed sales of \$4.1 billion and was able to increase dividends by 5.1 per cent last year. They have clearly profited from the increasing use of casual labour. Vicki is one of over 600,000 part-time and temporary workers in Ontario.

Durval Terceira lived in absolute poverty in his home country, going without shoes until he was 16 years old. Nevertheless, he

quickly became a passionate advocate for what is fair and just. In fact, Durval was fired at age 14 for organizing a union in the bakery where he worked. Arriving in Canada as an undocumented worker, he had to work long hard hours in unhealthy conditions for minimal wages. Durval became an organizer for his union, where he now struggles against the use of temporary agencies that allow employers to treat workers as widgets, without unions and the benefits they bring.

Mary Walsh accompanies Vicki and Durval on a journey of discovery to see firsthand how poverty has been reduced in Ireland and Sweden.

They discover that countries with the least poverty offer affordable housing and universal early childhood and post-secondary education. Those injured at work are treated with respect and given the help they need to move on in life. Food banks are virtually unknown. To Canadians working two jobs a day or to someone who has just lost a job in manufacturing, this new world provides a sense of hope.

EDUCATION FOR ALL

In the film, you will meet Shane Kelly, president of the Union of Students in Ireland, who describes what a difference it has made in his own life and his country to have free access to university. He was the first one in his family ever to enjoy the benefits of a university education and can now look forward to a professional middle-class lifestyle.

As Shane recounts, it was a huge boost for Ireland when it joined the European Union and they were able to develop 42 institutions of higher learning and a highly educated

workforce. Ireland was able to attract high tech investors and became the Silicon Valley of Europe. "Free education was at the center of the Celtic Tiger...It took me out of the poverty trap and allowed all of us to progress economically and socially."

Poor No More offers a pioneering look at a new reality. Poverty is now passé in many countries and could soon be reduced in Canada once our policy makers understand that poverty is a function of political choices and that it can be reduced without doing harm to the economy.

WHY MAKE THIS FILM?

This film coincides with a major nation-wide initiative to reduce poverty. Inspired by the success of many European countries and some of the American states, Quebec and Newfoundland were the first provinces to launch poverty reduction initiatives. Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba have since come onboard and the pressure is growing for the remaining provinces and the Federal Government to do likewise. As the former chair of the National Council of Welfare testifies:

Whether solving poverty is approached as an issue of fairness, human rights or economic productivity, there are common elements that are working in different societies and they can work in Canada.

Poor No More is designed to move the issue of poverty from the margins to the mainstream by

appealing to the millions of Canadians who are worrying about how to make ends meet. It is a sad fact that as the economy goes down, the potential audience for the film goes up.

Poor No More will be the first film to explain the current economic crisis and its impact on Canadians, and to offer solutions. This message is timely given that 400,000 Canadians lost their job since October 2008, when the global recession began in Canada. More workers are at risk as the Canadian dollar rises once again. Millions of Canadians were already stuck in precarious jobs and afraid of falling into poverty, afraid "there but for the grace of God go I." The film's message is of critical importance and the timing is perfect. As the economic recession drags on, people are looking for solutions.

THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

As mentioned, the film takes three Canadians on a trip to Ireland and Sweden in search of solutions. We find that the "Celtic Tiger", founded on a neoliberal model of corporate tax cuts has not worked out so well, but the Swedish model remains very attractive.

One of the most memorable scenes is of young Swedes exclaiming, "We love taxes!" It is easy to understand why when you see the benefits they enjoy. The Swedes enjoy a very high quality of life in an environment similar to that of Ontario, consistently scoring in the top ranks of social, health and economic indicators. How do they do it? What was most striking to see was that they did not target the poor but set out to improve life for all of their citizens.

The film does not advocate for new policies or more spending, both of which are necessary, but

not sufficient. It calls on us to re-examine our principles or values. We gradually learn to appreciate our collective power to elect political leaders who will introduce universal programs based on human rights, and who will regulate and redistribute in the public interest.

Poor No More does not call for charity that makes a few rich folks feel less guilty, but leaves people in poverty. It suggests that those who work hard are paid enough to escape poverty, and that universal childcare and post-secondary education helps people avoid poverty. It calls for social justice so everyone can live with decency and respect. It is not about individual redemption, nor even about community development, but about using the most powerful weapon in the hands of ordinary people, our democratic governments.

On May 20, 2009, at the Canadian Social Forum in Calgary, we showed an audience of 500 a sneak preview of a 45-minute rough cut. The response was very positive.

Great job, a very interesting and professional documentary that clearly shows what is happening in one of the richest countries in the world to some of our most vulnerable citizens!

~ Alexis Allen, President,
Nova Scotia Teachers Union

This is a well-done documentary that tells stories that need to be told.

~ Priscilla Corcoran Mooney,
Mayor, Branch, Newfoundland

Great characters - strong stories - great film!

~ Karl Nerenberg,
Volunteer Canada, Ottawa

Brilliant! I really appreciate the comparisons to other jurisdictions especially Sweden as it demonstrates what is possible. Thank you Mary for the wonderful social critique and for involving real people in the research/ exploration in Ireland and Sweden. Powerful, powerful film. Thank you.

~ Karri Munn-Venn,
Citizens for Public Justice,
Ottawa

I liked the fact that part-time and casual workers get an opportunity to tell their stories.

~ Lucy, Grande Prairie,
Alberta

Exposes the system and how it perpetuates poverty - an educational experience.

~ Bill Thomas, Yukon
Anti-Poverty Coalition

The final version is going to knock 'em dead. I want to see this film in every school, church, community college in Nova Scotia, and of course, Canada. Wow.

~ Elaine Garland, Canada Without Poverty, Westville, Nova Scotia

THANKS - I liked that you told the truth. You made us think about the possibilities for change. You've uncovered some myths!!!

~ Opal Sparks, The Stop Community Food Centre, Toronto, Ontario

THE FILMMAKERS



Poor No More was produced by Deveaux Babin Productions, a small company of progressive filmmakers who have done a lot of work with unions and with national and international broadcast-

ers including CBC, CTV and NBC among many others. There is no doubt that the film has been shaped by their roots. Director Bert Deveaux is an Acadian from Cheticamp, Cape Breton and producer Suzanne Babin comes from just outside of Sydney in industrial Cape Breton. Despite their long tenure at the CBC and experience producing reality TV in Hollywood, they retain a wonderful sensitivity to working class issues.

My primary role as executive producer was to arrange the financing that made it all possible. I was assisted in this by the contacts I had made in years of social justice work across the country, including a term at the Jesuit Centre for Social Justice and as founder and director of the Centre for Social Justice. I have also been teaching social sciences at York University for the past twenty years and have a strong interest in how business and social movements can shape public policy.

We three came together to work on the *Vote Out Poverty* event held at Massey Hall prior to the last Ontario election. In order to hear from people who could share their experience of poverty and suggest solutions, we produced a series of five video vignettes. They remain a useful resource for classroom use. These video vignettes can be found on the website of the National Council of Welfare or at www.VoteOutPoverty.ca.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



It is our goal to ensure that *Poor No More* reaches a broad audience and helps shape public opinion and public policy. Although we look forward to having the film broadcast and distributed to commercial movie

houses, we will not rely on the conventional means of distribution. Rather, we are making a special effort to involve our sponsoring organizations in a process of *social engagement* using the film to educate their members. We also want them to collaborate in a wider process of *community animation* that will inspire citizens and leaders in government with a vision of a more equitable and just Canada.

In simple terms, this means organizing screenings in a diverse range of venues; community centres, civic centres, ethnic halls, churches and local libraries, Legions, pubs, schools, churches, museums, bookshops, offices, fields and cinemas.

To assist this effort, our *Community Impact Campaign* will include the traditional techniques of film marketing and publicity (a media relations campaign, posters, post cards, etc) and the new technologies of social networking, using the internet to publicize the film and encourage people to organize local showings.

Our website, www.PoorNoMore.ca offers the chance to learn more about the issue, join the mailing list or tell friends about the film, download or order printed materials, participate in an online discussion or arrange to host a screening. It invites people to share the film with their community by showing it at a house party, classroom, church group, neighbourhood association or any other location. There are tips to organize a successful event, posters and invitations, suggestions for action, group activities and a discussion guide.

Young people and a few not so young can find clips of our film on *YouTube*, follow our progress on *Twitter* or help organize local screenings by joining us on *Facebook*.

TEACHING TOOL

Poor No More can help young people understand what is happening to their parents, their world and their own future in it. It should also inspire them with a sense of new possibilities and move them to action.

We are working with Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) to develop a section of our Action Kit specifically tailored to the Catholic curriculum and the needs of Catholic teachers. The Action Kit describes how to educate, organize and advocate reducing poverty. It will feature Interactivities, which are learn-by-doing

experiences that help people discover the underlying causes of poverty and case studies that help people learn more about the concepts and stories from the documentary.

At every showing of the film, people will be asked to sign an Action Card calling for action on selected issue(s), be it affordable housing or childcare, free post-secondary education, stronger unions, better employment insurance or pension plans. The front of the card would include pictures of poverty in Canada and new possibilities from Sweden and Ireland.

Loved the storytelling from Canadians. Personal stories are so powerful. It provided me with a positive perspective on unions and their role in protecting employees.

~ Valarie Campbell, Capital District Health Authority, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

LESSONS LEARNED



If we cannot imagine a world without poverty, we probably cannot get there. After a lifetime of conditioning, Canadians have been convinced that the poor will always be with us. So we think

in terms of minimal measures, increasing the minimum wage by a minimal amount or reducing the number of children in poverty by a small percentage. To think otherwise would be unrealistic or fiscally irresponsible, would it not?

The more I learn about what is possible the more disappointed I become with the paltry efforts at poverty reduction in Canada. I feel that we have been dealing in half-measures, if not actually misleading people about what will work to reduce poverty. It is understandable that people believe that nothing can be done, given how long they have been waiting for any improvement.

It is also understandable that people think we cannot afford to reduce poverty because they have not done the *social math* and compared the options before us. When the Federal Government announced a \$60 billion tax cut a couple of years ago, I asked my students to investigate how those funds could have been used. They came up with a fascinating list of options: \$4.4 billion per year would eliminate tuition fees and make university available to all qualified students; \$3.5 billion would provide childcare for children aged three to five; and \$15 billion would settle every outstanding land claim of Canada's First Nations.

Comparisons are already being drawn between *Poor No More* and Michael Moore's films. Indeed, our film was inspired in part by Moore's *Sicko*, which examined how other countries offer health care, hoping to inspire Americans by presenting them with viable alternatives. Naomi Klein refers to Moore as "America's Teacher." That resonates. When my academic mentor asked me why I was helping to make this film I responded, "I am a frustrated teacher that wants to reach a larger audience."

Help us arrange screenings in your community. Contact David Langille at Langille@socialjustice.org. Visit www.poornomore.ca for further information.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

We have had very enthusiastic support from a wide variety of groups, but a few donors deserve special mention, notably the Society of Energy Professionals, Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. Other sponsors and supporters include: the Alberta Teachers' Association; Anglican Church of Canada; Atkinson Charitable Foundation; British Columbia Federation of Labour; British Columbia Teachers' Federation; Canada Without Poverty; Canadian Council on Social Development; Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions; Canadian Federation of Students; Canadian Federation of Teachers; Canadian Nurses Association; Canadian Labour Congress; Canadian Union of Postal Workers; Canadian Union of Public Employees; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Make Poverty History; National Council of Welfare; National Union of Public and General Employees; Newfoundland Federation of Labour; Nova Scotia Government Employees Union; Nova Scotia Teachers Union; Ontario Coalition for Social Justice; Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; Ontario Federation of Labour; Public Service Alliance of Canada; Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario; Service Employees International Union; The Co-operators; United Association Local 46 (of Plumbers and Pipefitters); United Church of Canada; United Nurses of Alberta; United Steelworkers; and the United Way of Calgary.

As is evident, this film has been sponsored by Main Street, not by Bay Street or government. The days of generous government grants to support filmmakers are long over. We are grateful to our broad network of supporters for their generous assistance, without which this film would not be possible.

The size and breadth of this grouping is important for political reasons. It shows how much the public is concerned about growing poverty and inequality. These organizations speak for over five million Canadians from coast to coast; a potent block of voters.