

"Charity sees the need, but not the cause."

not just a
zine

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Justice, not Charity:
Interview with
Vancouver East MP
Libby Davies

A stylized sunburst graphic in the bottom right corner, featuring a large orange circle at the base with numerous yellow and orange rays extending upwards and outwards against a blue background.

MANDATE

The Right to Food (RTF) Zine's mission is to promote the human right to food that is healthy, nutritious, affordable, and presented with dignity. Our voices reflect the diversity that is the Downtown Eastside. Our articles, research, and recipes will speak to DTES residents, social justice groups, and beyond. Our readers will be kept informed, yet hungry to know more and to become more engaged. We are part of the local community and strive to act as a community-building tool.

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Justice, not Charity: Interview with Vancouver East MP Libby Davies

by Ludvik Skalicky and Stan Shaffer

On May 24, Lou and Stan had the pleasure of spending almost an hour with Libby Davies, the NDP MP for Vancouver East, in her office on Main near Broadway. Lou began the conversation by listing a host of problems around food: that seniors who get their pension cheque a week after Welfare Wednesday often have difficulty managing the final week; that working people have no access to food during the day and when they get back to the Downtown Eastside in the evening, the charity places may be closed; and that the food at many charity places contains sugars and starches, the servings are not substantial, and people become hungry again shortly after eating. As Jagrup Brar told a group at the Neighbourhood House during his January Welfare Challenge, “I’m always hungry.” Because of the typically starchy/sweet meals, we speculated that diabetes rates in the DTES are high and wondered about rates for hepatitis A or B. Finally we asked Libby how long she’s been involved with food issues in the DTES.

Libby, a patient and skilled listener, warmed to this question, responding that her first foray in the DTES was in the summer of 1972—40 years ago—when she was 19. She and a handful of UBC students opened a low-cost food store on

East Cordova as a summer project. Ironically, the Safeway at that time on the corner of Hastings and Gore was the most expensive one in the city. Her group bought food from wholesalers and thus were able to provide their customers with small amounts, such as a couple of tea bags or a single serving of coffee grounds.

The Downtown Eastside Residents Association started in 1973 and Libby, Jean Swanson, and others began publishing a magazine called *Downtown East*. They had an initial press run of 5,000 copies, which they hand delivered. They

wrote about topics such as food line-ups and sermonizing—a practice of forcing the hungry to listen to religious sermons before they are allowed to eat, something less common these days. Another controversial article, researched by Jean Swanson, concerned

the Salvation Army using an offshore tax haven. Libby added that at the time the Salvation Army “didn’t see people as citizens, people with rights.” *Justice, not charity* was a founding principle of the magazine. She said the concerns Lou described have “deep roots.”

Libby noted, however, that there have been some positive changes over the decades, such as the opening of the Carnegie Centre’s kitchen, which

Libby Davies is also calling for a national food policy which would focus on the “whole food chain,” from the disappearance of small family farms to the use of chemical additives.

serves “healthy food.” A related development was the Strathcona Community Garden, which supplied vegetables to the Carnegie’s kitchen. Libby emphasized that the DTES “needs both gardens and housing, with housing the first priority.” The lack of housing is due to poverty—not enough income for residents to have a place with kitchen facilities, or even a working hotplate.

A current topic of mutual interest was the visit of Olivier De Schutter, the UN envoy who spent 11 days in Canada in May on a “right to food” mission. She has a poster in her office of his visit and met him in Ottawa, along with the NDP caucus. Although De Schutter spent more time in remote locations, Libby told him about the “610 Diet” and urban problems of food security, along with the need to increase welfare rates. She says the envoy’s visit raised awareness at a national level about Canada’s food shortcomings, a topic that makes many Canadians uncomfortable. Basically, income inequality causes food insecurity. (Visit our website for an article about De Schutter’s visit: <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine>.)

What can she do? In her role as MP, she supports and lobbies on behalf of the poor. Her “big issue” is to create a national housing program along with income security. She is also calling for a national food policy which would focus on the “whole food chain,” from the disappearance of small family farms to the use of chemical additives. She mentioned a progressive group called Food Secure Canada, which has a website “where agriculture, environment, health, food and justice intersect” and where full reports of all aspects of food are available. (See website at <http://foodsecurecanada.org>.)

Libby believes people should have a choice either to have their own place with a kitchen, or to have a place with a community kitchen where they can participate in group food preparation. She is working with other NDP MPs who are examining food security: Malcolm Allen, Jean Crowder, and Alex Adamenko.

For a taste of Libby’s cooking, see her soup recipe in this issue.



One Woman's Commitment: Interview with Jennifer Allan

by Stan Shaffer

The DTES NH is buzzing with activity on Tuesday evenings as two crews prepare food: Crew 1 is half-a-dozen DTES volunteers making Wednesday's lunch (served from 11 am to 3 pm), while Crew 2 is Jen's Kitchen, just Jennifer Allan and two volunteers making sandwiches to hand out that evening to survival sex workers on Hastings Street. She started her partnership with the DTES NH in January of this year.

Jennifer Allan has been practicing this form of food outreach on her own in the DTES for over seven years. She comes from an activist Yukon family and is fiercely independent and totally dedicated to her self-chosen mission. She speaks quickly and clearly about the many issues and organizations that connect with this project. Her primary motivation is to change a social system which is based on gender, skin colour and income. Her operation challenges the fundamental way non-profits operate in the DTES because she accepts no government funding. Being volunteer-based gives her more freedom. Jennifer has trained about 100 volunteers over the years with ten or so currently active. Some are students unfamiliar with conditions in the DTES. In addition to preparing the food, the volunteers are taught

how to approach a survival sex worker, for example asking, "Are you hungry?"

Jennifer has a life-long passion for social justice, equality, and marginalized voices. After growing up in the Yukon, she worked in Calgary as a survival sex worker before moving to Vancouver. In January 2004, at age 26, she got off drugs and out of survival sex. With help and donations by the Sally Ann and friends, she began her mission by making a dozen sandwiches in her apartment and handing them out along with condoms. In 2006 she got a business licence, formed the non-profit Jen's Kitchen, and has spent \$30,000 of her own money over the years providing food hampers and services to survival sex workers, recently released prisoners, single moms, and victims of domestic violence.

"We don't know where these women are at in their life; for all we know they could be planning to commit suicide before the night is over and our little Bible verse gives them hope not to give up on life."

What is a survival sex worker? For Jennifer it means women who need to sell sex to buy drugs, alcohol, or reduce the pain of abuse; they are marginalized, have no choice, and endanger their lives. By contrast, sex workers (prostitutes) may work in brothels or advertise in places like the Georgia Straight; in most cases they choose their clients and are much less likely to be abused. An example of this difference is

that all of Willy Pickton's victims were survival sex workers. Jennifer says that Section 213, the recent Ontario decision that sweeps aside many anti-prostitution laws, may help sex workers but offers no improvement for survival sex workers. Basically, there's no right to say no, so it's a catch-22: survival sex workers will still be subject to discrimination, violence and police harassment.

Once a month, Jen's Kitchen gets help from a group from the Tenth Avenue Alliance Church. In an email, Jennifer writes that "We don't give a sermon verbally to the women, but a little bag of candy with a Bible verse that reminds the woman she is loved and not forgotten. We don't know where these women are at in their life; for all we know they could be planning to commit suicide before the night is over and our little Bible verse gives them hope not to give up on life. We do that to challenge the negative words other churches have told women who work in the survival sex trade. The churches haven't exactly treated survival sex workers in a loving manner."

Jennifer has received two local recognitions: the Everyday Hero Award (2007, nominated for Courage to Come Back) and the Naked Truth Award (2012, Right of Sex issue, Best Advocacy). She was on the front page of the *National Post* and featured on *100 Huntley Street* for a two-day story. In late fall 2011, she traveled across Canada to raise awareness about missing and murdered survival sex workers. Her goal is to bring these stories to the UN.

In her off hours Jennifer likes to relax at home watching TV shows such as *Criminal Mind* and *Law & Order*. However, she strongly opposes the DTES-based cop show, *The Beat*, because she says it exploits the lives of DTES residents. She reads books about Christianity and social justice, admires leaders like Martin Luther King, and ponders how the ideals and practices of world-wide social movements apply to the DTES. Jennifer deserves our thanks for her abundant energy and dedicated commitment to helping improve lives and conditions in the DTES.

Our Right to Food

by Paul M. Taylor

For much of my life I've have been having conversations about our right to food.

Over the last year, many of those conversations have been with my friends and neighbours in the Downtown Eastside. I spoke with a number of people who are becoming more and more concerned about the proliferation of a two-tier food system in British Columbia and beyond. Currently, those of us that are materially poor are finding it increasingly difficult to access healthy, local and organic foods. We all recognize nutritious food has positive effects on our health.

Do we really have a right to food?

This is a question that comes up in many conversations. In response, I choose not to negotiate or convince others of deservedness to food. In fact, I find it appalling to have to do so—we live in a country, and in the case of British Columbia, a province, that produces more than enough food for all our neighbours to enjoy. The unfortunate reality is that almost one million Canadian families are food insecure each year. This is a situation that is only getting worse as we see a growing number of working families becoming food insecure and dependent on charity to get through the month.

My preference in this discourse is to anchor my thinking with the international right to food framework that has existed for over 30 years. In 1976, as a part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was ratified. This document explains Canada's right to food obligations. It is important to be clear that

right to food does not mean that the government is responsible for handing out free food; instead, it is obligated to create and support an environment that enables people to feed themselves. Despite having signed the international covenant many years ago, a growing number of Canadians are food insecure. How can this be?

What can be done to make right to food a reality?

Issues of food insecurity need to be addressed broadly and collectively with the input of a variety of stakeholders (including those with lived experience of food insecurity), in a process that is based on a realistic and honest understanding of the political factors that impede our right to food. These factors include: low wages/incomes, a lack of affordable housing, the need for affordable child-care, the dominance of charity as the major societal response to food insecurity and the recognition of an often unspoken distrust of the poor that exists in the minds of many. In short, lack of access to food is largely a societal construct and can be improved through the actions of a willing society. A poverty reduction strategy for British Columbia (one of only two provinces that do not currently support one) is what many of us recognize as being a mechanism to address the growing imbalance.

To look at the situation in more detail, we must understand the impact of low wages/incomes. Without the enactment of a livable wage policy, more and more working individuals have to rely on food banks. This is clearly not a solution to food insecurity. The foods that are available at

food banks are often Eurocentric, which is a huge challenge to many low-income Chinese elders in the Downtown Eastside, and certainly does not support positive health outcomes. These foods are often high in sugar, high sodium, overly packaged and laden with preservatives. Often in more traditional food banks it is the food that people with more resources chose not to eat and has been sitting in their cupboards for months before they choose to take it to the Food Bank. With that said, I think it is important to note that food banks are important and should be viewed as an emergency resource that are a part of a continuum of supports and not a regular part of the monthly plight of people with low incomes to access food. Having food banks positioned in this way is unsustainable and does not work to address the systemic issues of poverty.

Despite the challenges and concerns with the role of food banks, it is exciting to see a growing number of food banks coming to the table as partners and allies in the movement towards universal access to healthy food. It is becoming increasingly common to hear the dedicated folks who work and volunteer at food banks supporting and participating in the call for things like a livable wage policy, which would give families the opportunity to make their own food choices, and ultimately reduce or eliminate dependence on food banks. These days, some food banks that recognize the challenges of the traditional model are asserting that food banks are not solutions to hunger and need not be positioned as such. A growing number of

food banks are becoming important allies in the fight to increase access to our right to food. The Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society has been animating community kitchens in many of the single room occupancy units (SROs)/hotels in the Downtown Eastside through the Downtown Eastside Community Kitchen Program. This too is a model that many of the more progressive food banks are beginning to use as a way to introduce people with limited storage to healthy and fresh foods and the benefits of preparing that food with their friends and neighbours.

The maximum that an individual on welfare in British Columbia can receive is \$610/month (with \$375 of that going directly to the landlord by way of rent).

Low welfare rates are another significant hurdle to food security. They are arbitrarily set and have no connection to the cost of living. The focus of welfare seems to be an attempt to keep people alive who are not working—not an attempt to support people as they transition to employment. The challenge here

is that inflation has deeply eroded any chance of welfare helping people to live healthy lives. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives research points to a 36% decrease in value of a welfare cheque as a result of inflation in the last twenty years.

The maximum that an individual on welfare in British Columbia can receive is \$610/month (with \$375 of that going directly to the landlord by way of rent). If we pretend that someone can access a place to live for \$375/month in a city like Vancouver, then this leaves just over \$7.50/day for that individual to maintain hygiene, seek employment, access public transportation and of

course secure and consume food that will allow for good health. Instead, those on inadequate welfare funding try to access their right to food by engaging in dangerous and unsafe survival work—binning, survival sex work and selling drugs. These activities put people in constant risk of danger, and ultimately are more expensive for society to address retroactively through increased medical and policing costs. There are several other problems associated with welfare and welfare rates, which could certainly be the basis of an entire research paper, but I will stop here.

Another key systemic hurdle to enjoying right to food is the lack of affordable housing and affordable childcare; or at the very least, strategies to address these issues. The reality of this means that child guardians are forced to choose between work and staying at home to care for their children. The loss here is not only the lost income that the caregiver could have received, but also the loss of increasing experience and seniority. A lack of affordable housing is a growing concern in cities like

Vancouver, particularly for those who are homeless, recipients of welfare or disability “supports,” and which often forces them to choose between housing and eating. The UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food suggests that these are key pieces of addressing food security and that it is incumbent on the Canadian government to live up to its international right to food obligations by paying greater attention to these key issues.

If we continue to ignore the systemic issues and funnel our resources into charitable efforts, the inequalities will become even worse. We need action now. It is important to the health of our friends and neighbours who are not able to secure the food that they need to keep them alive and healthy. There are some incredible advocacy groups and campaigns that are hard at work in British Columbia that you can support and get involved with that are working to challenge the systemic issues that get in the way of our right to food. Together we can demand better and we must!

Diet of Shame: National Media Food War

Olivier de Schutter, a high-level envoy from the United Nations Human Rights Council, made a controversial 11 day visit to Canada in May to investigate Canada’s food security. Not only was this the first time a UN official has visited a developed nation for this purpose, but it’s also the first time a UN official at this level has not been invited to meet with a prime minister, president or cabinet ministers. By not treating the UN envoy with respect, the Harper government gave itself an international black eye.

Read more on the RTF Zine website: <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine>

recipe

Libby Davies' Simple Soup Recipe

Here's my very simple recipe:

1. Take one medium size pot and melt some margarine or oil.
2. Slowly cook $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped onion until golden brown.
Stir in a few chilli flakes if you like a little zing.
3. Stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each of: celery, fresh tomatoes, small potato, cauliflower, some spinach (or whatever fresh veggies might be available to you). Add a good pinch of oregano and thyme if you have it.
4. Add enough water to cover it all.
5. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lentils (yellow or green). Simmer slowly until lentils are soft (add a little more water if it gets too thick)

Voila! A hearty, healthy and not too costly soup to last several meals.

Libby Davies



Philosophy

Inspiration: Give Care, Take Care

by Dan Moon

TAKE CARE IS SUCH A BAD MESSAGE TO BE SENDING OUT BECAUSE YOU CAN'T TAKE CARE, YOU CAN ONLY GIVE CARE AND receive care; you can't take care. Our words are more powerful than we know. Take care should be wiped clean from our vocabulary and replaced with give care. Give care is the message of the new millennium. Giving care is where we all must start from. Give care and let the healing begin.

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO GIVE CARE IS THROUGH HEALTHY FOOD. AND ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO RECEIVE CARE OR healthy food is at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, where people really give care.

recipes

Donna's Groovy Smoothies

Banana, Mango, and Coconut Milk Smoothie

- 4 ripe bananas (frozen bananas make great frosty smoothies)
- 2 cups ripe mango or canned mango pulp
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 2 to 4 cups skim or almond milk

Blend together bananas, mango, and coconut milk. Blend in skim or almond milk as needed to make smoothies easier to pour.

Quantity: This recipe makes about 6 large smoothies to share with friends.

Peach, Blueberry, Yogurt Smoothie

- 3 cups peaches, fresh or canned
- 2 cups blueberries
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2 to 4 cups fruit juice (orange, blueberry)

Blend together the peaches, blueberries, and yogurt. Blend in fruit juice to make it thick or thin. Pour and share. Then sip and watch your friends smile.

Quantity: This recipe makes about six large portions.



Salvage or Scavenge: The Omnivorous Observer on Pink Slime

by Raymond Bannatyne

“No Sam I am! I will not eat pink slime with those green eggs and fried spam.

No Sam, I will not.”

“Have you eaten pink slime (LFTB)? I have.”

With apologies to Dr. Seuss

“**P**ink slime,” or as big meat bafflegab would have it, “lean, finely textured beef” (LFTB), is at the forefront of food culture concerns from where it had festered on the periphery of consumer consciousness.

Food Channel chef Jamie Oliver has revealed that this meat by-product, because of its cheap and “malleable nature,” is used widely in institutional menus in many schools, daycares, senior homes, prisons, and even medical facilities.

Have you eaten pink slime (LFTB)? I have. You have too if you routinely eat factory processed ground meats purchased at any fast food joint or chain supermarket in North America.

Consumers are not told about pink slime in our meats because the meat industry contends that the process is merely an extension of the butchering process. Thus, government regulations do not require LFTB to be mentioned on consumer labelling. The process salvages/scavenges what profes-

sional meat cutters cannot claim from the carcass. Needle-thin jets of water scour bone and fat for the remaining scraps of “pink.” The remnants of dozens or even hundreds of carcasses are processed together.

The resulting slurry contains harmful bacteria from every carcass in the batch. To kill these bacteria (such as *E. coli* or salmonella), a sterilizing chemical called ammonium hydroxide is added. It is one of several chemicals sanctioned by government to render marginal foods such as

LFTB, or “chemically separated meats,” fit for human consumption.

Food scientists love this product for its aforementioned malleability. LFTB is used in canned meat products such as ravioli, other tomato pastas, frozen ground meat products,

and luncheon meats. Large grocery stores and chain operations can legally add about 10% LFTB to the ground meat they routinely package and sell by the pound as fresh ground beef. It is purely a cost-cutting measure on their part.

Food Channel chef Jamie Oliver has revealed that this meat by-product... is used widely in institutional menus in many schools, daycares, senior homes, prisons, and even medical facilities.

The good news is that there's a solution to avoiding the uncertain origins of these unlabelled ground meat products.

For example, ask your butcher to grind some fresh meat from the cooler. Most butchers will be happy to provide this service. These proud, local butchers have for many generations provided fresh meat for families in this neighbourhood. My own observations are that, including

the Chinese butchers and the new European butchers, we have at least a dozen such shops in the greater DTES.

In a future issue, The Omnivorous Observer will provide a list of these meat protein providers, and maybe introduce you to a local butcher known as "the Lady Butcher" whom I met in a recent foray into the heart of the DTES.



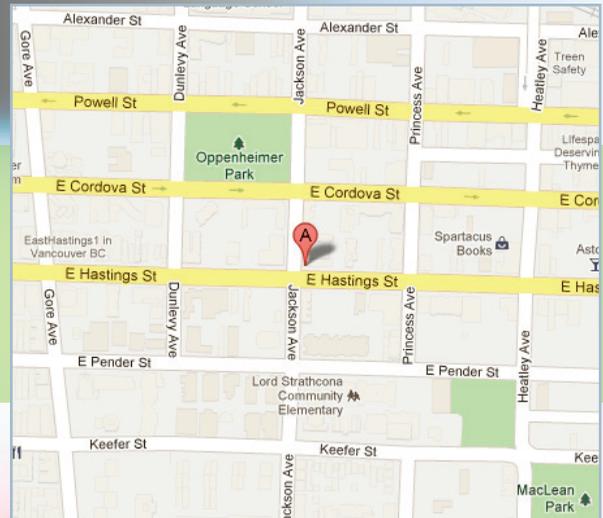
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CONTRIBUTING TO THE ZINE

Interested in contributing to the RTF Zine? We're always looking for original articles, artwork, or ideas that reflect the right to food. Let us know who you are at <http://dtesnhouse.ca/zine> or introduce yourself at the Neighbourhood House during operating hours (ask for Bill).

Donations of dishware, cups, and cutlery to the Neighbourhood House are also gratefully accepted. (No plastics, please.)