WORKING FOR CHANGE

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"30% of Americans survive on $8 an hour or less: I'm halfway looking forward to finding out how they do it."

- Barbara Ehrenreich in Nickel and Dimed

One of the thorny problems currently facing both federal and state legislatures is the issue of minimum wage versus living wage. To address this issue in Utah and provide the cultural event for the University of Utah's Women's Week, I directed Joan Holden's play, Nickel and Dimed. The play is based on the book Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America by well-respected journalist Barbara Ehrenreich. Hitting the New York Times best-seller list in 2001, this book has been used extensively in Sociology and Gender Studies courses at the University of Utah and in similar courses across the country. Holden's adaptation of the book has played at such notable theatres as the Intiman Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, and Theatre Works.

Given a short month to rehearse, and only one day in the performance space to load-in the set, set lighting cues, choreograph the extensive set and costume changes, and conduct a dress rehearsal, made this quite a project. To prepare for this project, I developed a dramaturgical packet for actors and designers which provided background information on the history of the minimum wage, an article from the Salt Lake Tribune on rental costs in Salt Lake County, and ancillary material on previous productions. Two of the articles that I provided in the dramaturgical packet ended up in the playbill for the show. The performance dates were March 1st, 2nd, and 3rd at the Jeanné Wagner Theatre. Houses for these performances totaled over one thousand. Walking outside of the theatre and hearing audience members buzz about low wages, poor working conditions, etc. (all issues addressed in this play) was gratifying. One of the goals of this project was use an artistic event to generate political conversation in Utah. Informal data suggest that this goal was met.