

## Indictment

You are responsible for the dehumanizing working conditions and the environmental and cultural destruction caused by the growth of the global economy. You stand accused of the following crimes:

- Paying workers in poor countries less than a living wage.
- Forcing workers to labor long hours with insufficient or no breaks.
- Allowing child labor.
- Intimidating workers with physical and emotional abuse.
- Subjecting workers to hazardous work environments with inadequate lighting and ventilation, exposure to chemicals and pesticides, unbearable temperatures, and other substandard working conditions.
- Destroying rivers and other bodies of water with toxic waste.
- Polluting the land with pesticides and herbicides.
- Polluting the air with poisonous gases.
- Deforesting the land.
- Harming the cultures and values of non-Western peoples.

### How do you live on 31 cents an hour?

You are a worker at a garment factory in the Las Mercedes Free Trade Zone in Managua, Nicaragua, sewing clothing for major U.S. labels. Your wages, including overtime, incentives, and bonuses are about 31 cents an hour, or \$14.88 per week.

<b>Your weekly expenses are:</b>	Round trip bus fare to work	\$2.45
	Breakfast (coffee or juice only)	\$1.92
	Lunch (rice, beans, some cheese, soft drink)	\$6.73
	Rent (cost for sharing a one-room hut with another family)	\$3.53
	Water (from one faucet that doesn't always work)	\$1.41
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	Subtotal (exceeds your \$14.88 in weekly wages)	\$15.04
<b>Now add:</b>	Electricity	\$1.77
	Wood (for cooking on outdoor stove)	\$1.88
	Powdered milk (enough for two infants)	\$4.08
	Childcare	\$6.12
	School (textbooks and supplies)	\$0.47
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	Total	\$29.34

Now the total is \$29.34, without even including clothing, medical care, or food for dinner. The minimum wage in Nicaragua is about 25 cents an hour. How will you survive?

Source: National Labor Committee

"It is a lie that our wages are adequate," one garment worker said. "Our children don't even have toys. We make baseballs out of old socks. We cannot feed our children right."

# Multinational Corporations

*You are responsible for the dehumanizing working conditions and the environmental and cultural destruction caused by the growth of the global economy.*

**Y**ou represent just one of the many multinational corporations that have relocated overseas in order to raise profits. You once did the majority of your factory work in the United States, but as other corporations sought out countries where they could pay lower wages and not worry so much about environmental regulations, you decided to move most of your production overseas. You may care about the ruined lives you leave behind as you lay off thousands of Americans, but to make a profit you do it anyway.

You should be ashamed of yourself. The people who used to work for you made wages that could support families. Now you pay your workers pennies an hour in places like Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, and China. You know that the wages you pay cannot support families. Couldn't you at least give your workers a living wage?

In addition to paying miserable wages, you subject your workers to dangerous conditions. Your factories have poor lighting, choking ventilation, and toxic chemicals. Yes, technically you don't own these factories; they are owned by your subcontractors who make your products. But that's just an excuse to have someone else take the blame for your dirty work.

What's really sad is that while workers labor 12 hours a day and barely make a living, your profits have never been higher. It's not fair that the workers produce all the wealth, but you get all the benefits. In fact, the combined sales of a single multinational corporation are often higher than the entire gross national product of many of the countries you operate in.

You make no commitments to the nations in which you have factories. You have little understanding of the cultures there or of the impact your presence has on the people. Your imperial attitude makes you believe that you are doing these nations a favor by providing jobs — that you are helping them “develop.” But the fact is, you are *destroying* cultures. Communities are torn apart when you flood markets with cheap

manufactured goods and foods that undersell local producers, and when you bombard people with advertising and images of Western lifestyles. Additionally, the environment has been devastated by your factories. Corporations like yours are directly responsible for deforesting the land, ruining the rivers with pesticides, and dumping toxic waste. The poisoned ecosystems can no longer provide the local people with food, water, and resources that have maintained their cultures for hundreds, even thousands, of years.

Another example of your indifferent attitude toward these nations is that you *intentionally* locate in countries that are run by un-democratic and repressive governments. As soon as workers organize unions to demand that you raise wages and improve working conditions, you count on the government to crush them. And if the ruling class can't control the people, you simply move to another country. While your careless attitude says “easy come, easy go,” you leave people in economic, political, and emotional turmoil.

Your atrocious record is not limited to your work overseas. You manipulate and use the public in the Western world too, by creating phony “needs” for products. You run sophisticated advertising campaigns that focus on ruining the self image of American consumers. You play on every insecurity imaginable. Without your product, you say, people are ugly, smelly, undesirable, unsuccessful, uncool — in essence, unlovable.

## Defense Strategies:

How do workers in poor countries benefit from your relocation? Why do they come work for you?

What are the pressures you are under that lead you to pay low wages, and treat the environment carelessly?

If the foreign governments welcome you into their countries, who are you to tell them how they are to treat their own citizens?

What role did U.S. consumers play in your decision to locate overseas?