

## 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
	<hr/>	
	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
	<hr/>	
	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."

# Poor Country Workers

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

**Y**ou work for a multinational corporation in a poor country. You are on the bottom of this economic pyramid, but your participation is essential. Without workers who are willing to take these jobs, companies would not leave rich countries to relocate in poor countries. You may complain that you are forced into these jobs by the need to survive, but unless you stand up for your rights, how can you expect the situation to change? If you didn't accept low wages and wretched conditions, companies would not be able to exploit you and pollute your country.

Lured by the promise of better lives, you move away from families and communities to take jobs that require long hours in dangerous conditions. The long hours you work lead to less time for your families and communities. Your children, in order to help the family financially, also take jobs at these factories. Rather than enjoying the freedoms of childhood, they are stuck in stifling, cramped areas working 10 to 12 hour workdays. What kind of parent are you to allow your children to work in such poor environments? Isn't there another way for you to survive without asking them to do this? Even with everyone in the family working, however, the wages you all earn are still not enough to maintain an adequate standard of living. You and your family are required to work long hours with little or no extra pay and few breaks. Standard factory conditions include dangerous machinery, inadequate lighting and ventilation, and toxic fumes.

In addition to the impact of these factories on family life, the work that you choose to do contributes to the destruction of your community's environment and culture. You have been pushed off the more fertile land by your country's elite and multinational growers. This move leaves you and your family with little land to use in producing food for your family. Faced with the poor soil and farming conditions, you and other families decided it was not possible to survive in your traditional communities. Despite the fact that your community had close ties, you separated in favor of the economic opportunities in the city. But it didn't offer you

all you had heard it would. Work is difficult. Women and children are the most "sought after" workers because they are more willing to work in poor conditions for less money. The supervising bosses patrol the factories to be sure that everyone is being productive. There is virtually no opportunity to talk with others and if you are suspected of organizing to demand better working conditions, you can expect to be fired, jailed, or even physically attacked. You miss the closeness of your community and you worry that your children will forget their cultural roots. Even though life was never "easy" for you, you used to be able to survive as both a family and a community. Now, you see many things changing — mostly for the worse.

But here's the point that needs to be emphasized: You chose these lives for yourselves. There is no slavery in your country. No one held a gun to your head and said, "Move to the city to work in a factory owned by a multinational corporation." Ultimately, you have to take responsibility for these conditions.

You do not have the financial security, health insurance, or legal options that the middle- and upper-class employers have. But there are things you could do. You could organize and protest. Sure, companies have been known to relocate when workers demand higher wages or better working conditions, but it's always risky to work for change. You could make the effort to educate yourselves and your children. You could draw international attention to your plight in hopes of forming alliances with workers in Western nations and other workers in poor countries. You, however, have chosen to continue to work for a company that exploits its workers and the local environment. And that's why you are on trial here.

## Defense Strategies:

How has the ruling elite "sold out" the people of your country?

What motivates multinational corporations to locate in your country?

How can anyone blame you for simply doing what you needed to do to support your family?

How might the conditions of your work improve if U.S. consumers demanded changes from the corporations they support?