

## 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  |
|                                  | 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  |
|                                  | 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."

# System of Profit

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

This gets complicated. You are not a person or even a group of people, but a system. We like to blame crimes on people. But in this case, the real criminal is not human. The fact that you are invisible is part of your strength; many people consider you a part of “human nature” and, therefore, unable to change. You force corporations to obey your laws. If corporations don’t care more about making a profit than protecting the environment or treating workers and consumers decently, then they go out of business. *You are the rules of the game.*

Participating in this “game” of the profit system also affects people’s minds and emotions. You create a feeling that people need to have material wealth in order to be happy. The system of profit has been successful in telling people that money, wealth, and possessions are what make them valuable, a fact that is reinforced by advertising.

The Rules of the Game are simple, but disastrous:

- 1) Capital must expand; it must make a profit or it “dies.” In search of profit, Capital travels the world like a heat-seeking missile, looking for the best situation for itself.
- 2) The only goal of the system of profit is to make more profit, at whatever cost to the environment and human beings. You — the system — are not concerned with the long-term effects of your actions.
- 3) To make a profit, Capital must compete with others engaged in this same pursuit.
- 4) You must get the cooperation of workers and consumers in order to succeed. Without them you cannot survive. The system promises these people that wealth and comfort — rather than human relationships — will make them happy. And besides, so long as the system of profit is the only “game” being played, people have no choice but to play by your rules. To make money and survive, they must serve your system.
- 5) You have pushed the idea that anyone can share in the benefits of the system of profit, if only they work hard enough. This has been especially powerful in the United States with the idea of the “American Dream.” But in prac-

tice, this game of profit is controlled by — and mostly benefits — the owners of Capital.

The system of profit pushes people to make decisions based on financial gain rather than what might benefit the community. You rip apart people’s communities and ways of life by placing the concern for money above people’s right to maintain traditional culture. You may pay money to workers in poor countries (not a livable wage), but at the same time you destroy their society and ways of taking care of each other and their land.

Competition and the quest for riches and financial security lead people to sacrifice other people’s welfare for their own immediate gain. It’s a lesson that the system of profit teaches so well: Look out for yourself because if you don’t, no one else will. This individualism encourages people to purchase products from companies that mistreat workers and the environment. It’s an attitude developed by living life in the system of profit.

Some of you may try to blame multinational corporations for the crimes you commit. But they behave the way they do because in order to survive they must obey the laws of the system of profit.

The global system of profit and the impact of multinational companies is far-reaching. How are citizens in poor countries able to make a living when they have been pushed off their land by multinational agribusiness? When consumers demand cheaper products, without raising concerns about the environmental and the human costs of their purchases, how can workers be expected to resist the policies of the companies they work for? Although you are the invisible player in this trial, it is your structure that has created this situation of injustice and inequality in the first place. Therefore, you, the system of profit, must shoulder the blame.

## Defense Strategies:

In what ways do the corporations drive the system of profit?

How do consumers help to sustain the system of profit?

What would make poor country ruling elites “sell out” their own people?

If this system is so repressive to workers, why do they agree to participate?