

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.

Your weekly expenses are:	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
Now add:	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."

U.S. Consumers

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

You, the buyers of goods and services, are the driving force that keeps multinational corporations in business, and leads to such misery around the world. If it wasn't for *your* demand for goods, there would be no need to supply them.

Just look at your home right now. Your kitchen is full of gadgets and expensive toys — all purchased in the name of “making life easier.” Do you really need all of those items? Your home is loaded with high-tech goods like stereos, cell phones, TVs, and VCRs — all purchased with little thought of the impact on workers around the world or the environment. Would you feel deprived without them? And check out your closet. It's filled with clothes and accessories — mostly made in Asian countries, by the hands of poor women — all purchased in the name of “looking good.” Do you *have* to have a new outfit for every day of the week? Many people in the world live simply. You could too. It's not uncommon for you to spend over \$100 dollars on a pair of sneakers. And when you shop for clothes, you check out the brand name — after all, you deserve only the best.

You may not consider yourself “wealthy” compared to the upper class in the United States. True, there is enormous inequality here in the USA. But that doesn't change the fact that you, the average American consumer, spend 20 times more on products than the average person living in South America, Asia, or Africa. Poverty in the United States and poverty in Third World nations are just not the same.

You've heard about global sweatshops. You know that people overseas have it rough — they barely make enough money for their families to survive, they have to work long hours, and the working conditions are often hazardous to their health. But *still* you buy goods from the companies that employ them. It seems that you don't care about the working conditions of these fellow humans — that's their problem. Your greed and desire to keep up with the Joneses make you responsible for the plight of workers around the world.

Additionally, your spending habits are killing our environment. You habitually use materials that can't be recycled, polluting cars, and scarce resources. As 5% of the world's population, U.S. citizens consume almost 40% of the world's resources. At this rate, the earth cannot sustain itself.

Go ahead and blame the corporations, or even the system of profit, if you like. But your dollars are the oil that keeps this hurtful, wasteful economy running.

Defense Strategies:

Where does your “need” for items come from?

What kinds of pressures exist in our consumer society to have the “latest and the best”?

You are so busy trying to make ends meet yourself. How can you be expected to change the entire global economy?

How can it be *your* fault that Third World nations pollute their environment and treat their people poorly?

Aren't you justified in seeking a better life for yourself and your family? Isn't this exactly what everyone in the world is trying to do?