

READING AND SPEAKING

The global economy

- 1 Work with a partner. What do you understand by globalization and consumerism? What are their pros and cons?
- 2 Are these sentences facts (F) or opinions (O)?
 - 1 There are severe environmental changes taking place in the world.
 - 2 Globalization is synonymous with Americanization.
 - 3 Only 20% of the world's population lives in rich countries, but they consume 86% of the world's resources.
 - 4 The more people are in debt, the richer the banks become.
 - 5 The United States is a target for the have-nots of globalization.
 - 6 Debt repayments by developing countries are nine times as much as the aid they receive.
 - 7 The global economy puts no value on morality, only profit.
 - 8 Countries in the industrialized West exploit workers in poorer countries.

What is your reaction to the facts? Do you agree with the opinions? Compare your answers with the class.

- 3 Look at the title of the article. What do you understand by it? Read the article. Which of the topics in exercise 2 are mentioned?
- 4 According to the article, are these statements true or false?
 - 1 'The economy' is not the same thing as the economy.
 - 2 People feel optimistic because their lives are so prosperous.
 - 3 The more we spend, the better life is.
 - 4 If people stop spending, the economy collapses.
 - 5 Companies respond to the needs of consumers.
 - 6 It's good that we can buy cheap goods from around the world.
 - 7 Many developing countries export food to pay back their debts.
 - 8 We know how to solve some of these problems, but we don't want to do it.
- 5 What do you understand by the words and phrases highlighted in the text?

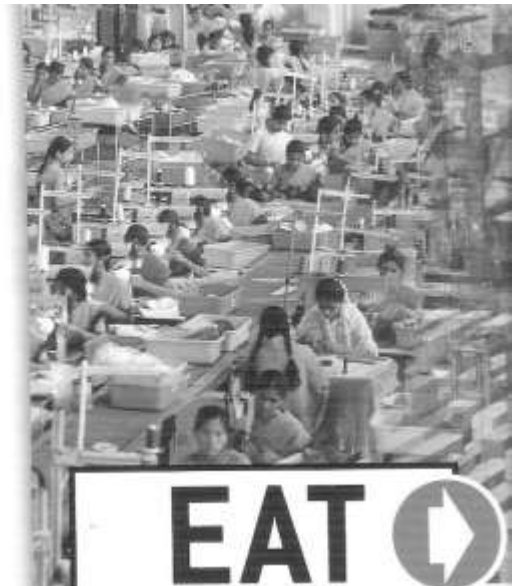
What do you think?

- 1 What are some of the examples of craziness in the world that Jonathan Rowe mentions? Can you add any more?
- 2 Is it economic colonialization to sell Kentucky Fried Chicken to the world, or is it just giving people what they want?
- 3 What do you think are Jonathan Rowe's attitudes to the following? What are your attitudes?

• multinational corporations	• pollution and the environment
• anti-globalization protesters	• supermarkets
• economists	• Western banks
• public transport	• companies who use cheap labour in poor countries

The writer holds strong views on these issues. Can you present some counter-arguments?

Multinational corporations keep prices down.



EAT



Economic growth is the route to

I want to talk about the economy. Not 'the economy' we hear about endlessly in the news each day and in politicians' speeches. I want to talk about the real economy, the one we live in day by day.

Most people aren't particularly interested in 'the economy'. 'Share prices are flying high, interest rates are soaring. The Dow Jones' index closed sixty-three points down on 8472.35.' We hear this and subconsciously switch off.

Notice that 'the economy' is not the same as the economy. 'The economy' is what men in suits play with to make vast personal wealth. The economy is where the rest of us live on a daily basis, earning our living, paying our taxes, and purchasing the necessities of life.

Something wrong

We are supposed to be benefiting from all the advantages of a prosperous society. So why do we feel drained and stressed? We have no time for anything other than work, which is ironic given the number of labour-saving devices in our lives. The kids are always hassling for the latest electronic gadgets. Our towns become more and more congested, we poison our air and seas, and our food is full of chemicals.



SLEEP BUY DIE

global prosperity. Or is it? Jonathan Rowe examines the price we pay for this growth

There's something wrong here. If times were truly good, then you'd think we'd all feel optimistic about the future. Yet the majority of us are deeply worried. More than 90 per cent of us think we are too concerned about ourselves and not concerned enough about future generations.

Producing and consuming

The term 'economic expansion' suggests something desirable and benevolent, but expansion simply means spending more money.

More spending doesn't mean that life is getting better. We all know it often means the opposite - greed, deprivation, crime, poverty, pollution. More spending merely feeds our whole economic system, which is based on production and consumption. Unless money keeps circulating, the economy collapses. Airlines go bust, taking plane manufacturers and travel agents with them. If we don't keep consuming, then manufacturers and retailers go out of business. People don't buy houses, clothes, washing machines, cars. The whole system goes into stalemate.

Creating need

As a leading economist put it, consumer societies are 'in need of need'. We don't need the things the economy produces as much as the economy needs our sense of need for these things. Why, in our supermarkets, do we have to choose from sixty different kinds of toilet paper and a hundred different breakfast cereals? Need is the miracle that keeps the engines of expansion turning relentlessly. In economics, there is no concept of enough, just a chronic yearning for more. It is a hunger that cannot be satiated.

There is so much craziness in the world. There is an American company that manufactures a range of food with a high fat content. This causes obesity and high blood pressure. By coincidence, the same company also makes products that help people who are trying to diet. Not only that, it even produces pills for those with high blood pressure.

Nearly all of my mail consists of bills (of course), banks trying to lend me money, catalogues trying to make me spend it, and charity appeals for the losers in this ecstasy of consumption - the homeless, the refugees, the

exploited, the starving. Why is it possible to buy strawberries from Ecuador and green beans from Kenya when these countries can hardly feed their own people? It is because these are cash crops, and the countries need the money to service their debts. Notice that servicing a debt does not mean paying it off. It means just paying the interest. Western banks make vast profits from third world debt.

Making changes

How do we break the cycle? We need to become far more aware of the results of our actions. We buy clothes that are manufactured in sweat shops by virtual slaves in poor parts of the world. We create mountains of waste. We demand cheap food, mindless of the fact that it is totally devoid of taste and is produced using chemicals that poison the land. We insist on our right to drive our own car wherever we want to go.

The evil of the consumption culture is the way it makes us oblivious to the impact of our own behaviour. Our main problem is not that we don't know what to do about it. It is mustering the desire to do it.