

Consumer Society

Robert: We're gonna talk a little bit about consumer society here, and I felt perhaps I should give a definition of what we're talking about first.

Joe: Um-hum.

Robert: Ah... the consumer society, or the consumer economy it's also called, is exactly what it says it is. It is an economy based on the idea that people consume, and that is what is supposedly what creates the jobs that people have. And, if people stop consuming, then people will stop having places to work, and the economy will run down. That is the consumer society. Was it invented in The United States in the nineteen-fifties? And it has spread around the world ever since? And what do you make of it as people, and as parents perhaps, particularly?

Joe: Well, obviously, we've had a consumer society for decades, it seems to me, that in Norway particularly, that it's reached ridiculous heights. That now there's a brand awareness that has just taken over. So, if you want a new pair of jeans, you have to have the one particular sort of jeans. Mobile phones for example, it's absolutely... You're absolutely out of the race if you haven't got the right one.

Robert: You're thinking of a Nokia, as opposed to some other kind?

Joe: Yeah, and, I mean, you have the particular number of Nokia, right, yeah... It's, it's got to the state now where parents are just running to keep up with what their kids need.

Linda: Well, I think it's up to us as parents really, to say yes or no, and to say what we believe in. We're not gonna actually really change the way our teenage kids operate. We don't have that power anymore, and compared to when we were growing up, they have access to so much information. I mean, I don't actually think it's entirely negative, because I know kids who go on the Internet, who check various products, who compare them. They are getting very good at getting information, and comparing things. OK, we might not agree with their priorities, and think that buying a pair of fancy boots for three thousand kroner which are gonna last for a month is not a good way to spend money, but I think that they are actually much more aware as consumers than we were when we were growing up.

Joe: I don't think that's true at all. I don't think that they're more aware. I think, just that Capitalism has become considerably more aggressive, so that they're exposed to much greater pressure than ever we were.

Robert: Well, once they buy those three thousand kroner boots, somebody is making them... and they're the people who work at the malls, they have their jobs, etc. So, aren't we being a little bit hypocritical when we start knocking this, after all we are part of it.

Joe: Oh yeah, we are part of it, but on the other hand, are you... if you're one of these

disciples of constant growth, economic growth... this will... this is the answer to all our economic problems, that we just consume more, we make more, fair enough, but it seems to me that maybe the time has come to think a little differently, that we maybe should consume less, maybe we should get our children to think in those terms as well, that they could maybe buy something second-hand even, you know, we don't need to double consumption and double productivity.

Robert: But the...

Linda: The angle that I take, with my kids, is that I try to get them to think about quality, because I think part of the problem as well is all these cheap chain stores. We buy an item of clothing which you maybe wear once and then you throw it away because it's just so cheap, and you know it's not gonna last a long time. Ok, if they have the money, they should be allowed to spend it, but choose something which is quality, and which will last a while.

Robert: But, will they do that? I mean, his point is that they're so brainwashed that they'll go off and buy, not quality, but the brand name.

Linda: I think they will actually learn that over time. Obviously, initially, with the first flush of power, when they can spend their own money, they make all sorts of wrong decisions, but with a bit of guidance, and a bit of experience, I think they will... they have a chance of turning into reasonable consumers, not absolutely crazy consumers.

Joe: But, by the time they get to that stage, they have how many pairs of Victoria Beckham jeans for four and a half thousand Norwegian Crowns a shot, how many will they have bought?

Linda: It depends on whether you buy them as a parent, or whether you say "OK, if you want those, which are so expensive, you could go out and work, get a Saturday job, and pay for them yourself."

Joe: But, isn't it a question of... it's a question of ideology as well. If you're taking part in this sort of race to get the right brand, it is also the race to have the right identity, to identify yourself with the right people, and the right people in this case are people like Victoria Beckham... Are people with tons of money and no sense.

Robert: Ok, well, I mean, give it that Victoria Beckham isn't my idol, I mean, aren't you kind of knocking the fact that these people are going off and finding their own heroes, and their own thoughts. Every teenage generation does it, and they use products to be able to do that, as well, to express themselves.

Joe: They're not their own here, not their own here, they're constructed, they're given to them.

Robert: If that's the case, then why are these constructed brands, and these constructed

heroes, so popular all over the world? I mean, if this is such a bad system, why is India so happy to be joining? Why is China so happy to be joining? Why is...

Joe: Because Capitalism, aggressive Capitalism works, it sells.

Robert: It sells, and makes jobs.

Linda: And it does make some people happy.