

Headline English

2010, week 2 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

1 **Robert J. Gordon**

2 **Holidays in Europe**

3 *(original at <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/435>)*

4 Europe makes itself poor by working many fewer hours per person than
5 America. Low European work effort combines the impact of long
6 vacations, high unemployment, low labour force participation and early
7 retirement. Moreover, those in Europe who have jobs not only work fewer
8 weeks per year due to long vacations, but they work fewer hours per
9 week when they are not on vacation.

10 Because Europeans work shorter hours, they have only 70% of the real
11 market income per person compared to Americans (adjusted for
12 differences in prices across countries). As a result, Europeans face their
13 holidays from a position of poverty rather than abundance.

14 These long European holidays, which take four or five weeks, are pitiful
15 and inefficient. They violate the basic economic instinct that there is a law
16 of diminishing returns that applies to everything: especially to being in the
17 same small hotel room for a month with the same set of screaming
18 children or nagging grandmothers.

19 Americans take a week in the summer at a nearby lake or seashore
20 beach, a few days at Thanksgiving and/or Christmas to be with the
21 relatives, and a week in winter to ski in the many resorts that are within
22 driving distance of much of the population. In contrast to long European
23 holidays, this is much more efficient and much more interesting. The city
24 doesn't close down, diminishing returns of being bored with your relatives
25 does not set in, and because American income per head is higher than
26 European, there is plenty of money for Americans to travel.

Questions

- 1) What are the differences between Americans and Europeans in terms of working hours according to paragraph 1 (lines 4 to 9)?
- 2) What are the consequences of this difference as regards pay?
- 3) The text contrast American and European holidays. What adjectives does it use to describe them, respectively?
- 4) 'Adjusted for differences in prices across countries' (lines 11 to 12) – explain the meaning of this phrase.
- 5) Throughout the text, there are many connector words like 'moreover' in line 7. These words, called *conjuncts* in linguistics, are very important for structuring your writing. Find the other conjuncts in the text and make up contexts in which they can be used.
- 6) What is 'a law of diminishing returns'(lines 15 to 16 and 24)? What makes returns diminish and what are returns in this context anyway? How is this law linked to the line of argument that the text uses?
- 7) Which way of spending holiday is the more preferable according to the author of the text – the American, or the European?
- 8) Do you agree with the author? Do you think that working longer hours can boost the economy? Or, do we, quite the contrary, need more time off and shorter hours?

Vocabulary

impact of something on something (line 5) – influence; effect

violate (15) – to break, infringe, or transgress (a law, rule, agreement, promise, instructions, etc.)

close down (24) – to terminate the operation of; discontinue; stop

set in (25) – to begin or start

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, or <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Přejeme Vám mnoho studijních úspěchů.

Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček: