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There's a quaint story on the web about an elderly Mr. Black, a highly regarded and well-liked sales clerk at a large department store who collapsed and died from a heart attack as he was leaving his job on Thanksgiving Day (yes, the store was open). That store closed the next day in his memory, but employees of other branches all wore black in mourning for their fellow employee. The following year, employees again wore black on the Friday following Thanksgiving, and as the years passed, other stores picked up the custom.

This, claims the story, is the real explanation for "Black Friday," - not that it is the first time store ledgers go from being in the red to being in the black, and not that Philadelphia streets were so jammed with traffic, as is more often given as the explanation for the origin of the phrase. The custom eventually died as a result of staff turnover, mergers, and acquisitions and the passage of time, according to the web story.

Black Friday, however, is still with us, but in a very different context. Now it represents the height - and depths - of consumerism, with its mantra of "buy, buy, buy." (Fortunately, the madness hasn't gone as far in the CNMI as it appears to have on the mainland.) Yet, at a time when not only are most incomes shrinking, many of the earth's resources shrinking, and many of the world's species, in effect, shrinking as well, Black Friday's mantra of buying more "stuff" would seem rather inappropriate. What the world needs now is not more stuff, but less. Not more non-biodegradable plastics on the market, but less. Not more planned obsolescence in cars, appliances, clothing, tvs, DVDs and other techie toys, but less. Not more one-time usage water and juice bottles and plastic containers, but less.

Villages, towns, cities around the world are struggling with overflowing garbage dumps, litter blots the landscape and fouls the beaches, debris pollutes the oceans - all because there's too much "stuff" out there that doesn't harmlessly disintegrate, and that no one knows what to do with.

Annie Leonard, author of *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession With Stuff Is Trashing the Planet, our Communities, and our Health - and a Vision for Change* says the solution, however, is not more attention to local litter collection and control. Rather, what is needed is a focus on "further upstream" - where all the trash originates.

Moreover, she says the solution lies in re-thinking not only how items are packaged, but how items are made, what they're made from and how they get from their point of origin to the consumer. She points to the waste and destruction that occur in deforestation, in strip mining just to obtain the raw materials, the slave labor that is still employed in many places to put items together, the enormous amount of fuel that is consumed in bringing parts from manufacturers to assembly points and from assembly points to the eventual consumer, the planned obsolescence that gives items a very short life, and the flawed laws that cover how one "gets rid of" items one no longer finds useful. Rivers, lakes and oceans have become poisoned, species have gone extinct, the gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to increase, climate change continues to take its toll - because the world is focused on what Leonard describes as a "take-make-waste" system.

The sequence in the slogan "reduce, re-use, re-cycle" is deliberate, she states. To reduce, more should be done to encourage manufacturers to produce less wasteful products. The recent development of standard mobile phone chargers so they can be used on any phone, regardless of make or model, is one example. Leonard would force manufacturers to take back what they've

produced - "you made it, you deal with it" - when they no longer work so that their components and content could be re-cycled and re-used rather than tossed on the garbage heap.

"Re-cycling is an admission of defeat; an admission that we were not clever enough or didn't care enough to design it [any object] to be more durable, to repair it, or to avoid using it in the first place," Leonard quotes chemistry professor Dr. Paul Connett - long time expert on waste issues - as saying.

Leonard lists four steps towards a more sustainable future: 1) Economies should no longer be rated in terms of gross domestic product (with its emphasis on how much is produced), but on an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, or Genuine Progress Indicator, or the New Economics Foundation "Happy Planet Index," which basically measures how well a country converts resources into well-being. 2)The world needs to do away with war. "Funding wars while cutting schools and health clinics and other vital social needs doesn't work for me and I hope it doesn't work for you," she writes. 3)Businesses need to internalize their costs. The cost of providing tax subsidies to the oil companies, of building public infrastructure to facilitate their operation, and of maintaining a military presence in oil-producing regions are all external costs that Leonard proposes be included in calculating the cost of gasoline - not just the cost of discovering the oil, pumping it to the surface, refining it and delivering it, as is now the case. 4)Lastly, she says, in order to achieve a sustainable path for consumption, people need to translate productivity growth into shorter hours of work instead of more income.

Interestingly, a universal health system could help bring about the latter: according to Leonard, if people did not have to worry about funding their health care many would choose to work fewer hours and earn less, which would mean they'd buy and trash less stuff - which would itself help the planet - and it would give people more time to engage in community and civic activities, which would also benefit the ultimate health and sustainability of the planet.

Her goals may be ambitious and idealistic. But her basic tenet - that there is too much un-recyclable, unnecessary, wasteful stuff being produced is right on target!

Speaking of ravishment and injustice, a funny thing happened in the process of the federal takeover of CNMI's immigration authority: the CNMI Covenant was amended - not once, but thrice (as local usage would have it). If there was consultation in the process, so far as I am aware it was not made public. Technically, it is a U.S. public law that was amended, but since the Covenant is a public law, the amendments were, in effect, also amendments to the Covenant. The Consolidated Natural Resources Act (CNRA), which provides for the USCIS takeover, amends Article V of the Covenant by deleting Section 503(a), which stated that the immigration and naturalization laws of the U.S. would not apply to the CNMI; by deleting all of Section 506, which provided citizenship to the people of the CNMI; and by amending Article VII, Section 703(b) by deleting the phrase "immigration and naturalization" and inserting an "and" between "quarantine" and "passport," to the effect that immigration and naturalization fees collected in the CNMI would no longer be paid into the CNMI Treasury, as they had been heretofore. The first two changes are self-evident results of the take-over. As far as the third change is concerned, there's a little more at stake. While in every other U.S. state or entity it appears that the federal government gets to keep the fees it charges for immigration and naturalization, until now, the CNMI had been exempt. Though it is not illogical that the federal government now also

keep the fees it collects in the CNMI, it does represent a significant loss of revenue to the CNMI.

The \$150.00 vocational education surcharge that is also collected by the USCIS does get returned to the CNMI, but it comes from CNMI employers, so it doesn't really bring in new money.

It would have been nice if the federal government had offered the CNMI at least token acknowledgment of the fact that it was altering the CNMI's Covenant. It would also have been nice if it had provided for a gradual adjustment to the CNMI's loss of income in the process.

Regardless of how one feels about the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, it is, nonetheless, a fascinating social phenomenon. Thousands of people gathered and without a named leader, without an identified spokesperson, without wealthy or charismatic sponsors/supporters, managed to stay fed, housed and clothed, to make their views heard, to reach out and influence others, and eventually, to work with other similar groups across the country - with only a few isolated instances of violence. The many leader-wannabe's among them all agreed not to do so, to accept the voice of the many.

The phenomenon did not occur only among unrelated throngs of individuals, but even reached into organized government bureaucracies, as police departments and other government agencies across the country communicated with each other - without any formal structure or spokesperson - to share experiences, advice, and strategies for coping with the Occupiers.

It's not clear whether all of the Occupiers have now dispersed, but the phenomenon will remain in people's memory. It's interesting to speculate on what the long-term effects will be, what unintended consequences will emerge.

Short takes:

- The coconut wireless has it that Kam Corporation - the Pacific Islands Club's new Japan-based owners - is not interested in maintaining PIC as a profit-making operation, but is instead trying to make it a losing proposition - by eviscerating its operation and services - so that the corporation can avail itself of Japan's apparently generous tax breaks for companies whose overseas investments lose money.

- Kili, the CNMI's non-voting representative to Congress, has pulled off a major coup in getting the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service to announce that it will recognize the provisions of his H.R. 1466 in the absence of Congressional action on the measure. CIS has promised only temporary relief to the four categories of foreign workers and their relatives covered in H.R. 1466, and it is not assured that all who apply will be accepted, but nonetheless, the concession remains an outstanding achievement on Kili's part. Had he not campaigned tirelessly in Congress and the halls of Homeland Security on behalf of his measure, many of those affected could technically have been forced to leave the CNMI over this week-end.

- There's been no formal announcement, but flu shots are available **at no cost** to everyone who wants one at the Commonwealth Health Center (oops - is that still the correct way to refer to it?). CHC's Immunization Clinic is open Mondays through Fridays from 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. The Clinic is located on the ground floor, facing Middle Road.

- According to the *Saipan Tribune*, the governor/head of the Republican Party has asked Republican members of the Legislature to let him know by December 30 whether they intend to run for re-election under the Republican banner. Elections are a year away. Why must the CNMI ape national behavior, and campaign in earnest so far in advance? Much can happen between now and November 2012 - much of it unpredictable. To have to commit so early in the process is restrictive to say the least, if not downright punitive.

- I've been accused of over-generalizing when it comes to commenting on the legislature and what it does or doesn't do. I should remember, I was told, that not all legislators agree, think alike, and that to criticize or find fault with the legislature as a whole is not fair. I plead guilty. I offer in my defense that I am more right-brained than left-brained, so remember more, think more, in generalities rather than in specifics, and that I am not equally familiar with all 29 members of the legislature. Besides, I don't like singling out individuals. But with election campaigns already underway, identifying who supports what becomes more important - and I've resolved to try be more specific from here on out.