

Buy Nothing Day gains support

Verdun vegan café participates in BND by not selling any of their products

By Richard Tardif

Last Friday, millions of people from across the U.S. didn't participate in what has become known to shopkeepers as "Black Friday."

Although it may sound dire, the "Black Friday" title evidently derives from cash-strapped shopkeepers, hoping that the early Christmas bargain hunters will pull them out of the red and into the black. Always on the day after the U.S. Thanksgiving and a month before Christmas, it's considered the biggest day of the year for shopkeepers.

But as tight fist consumers unlocked their wallets and muscled their way through many of America's aisles, they had to move aside as political and peace activists, and even general consumers, pushed empty carts and cut up credit cards, because this year's "Black Friday" was also international Buy Nothing Day (BND).

BND began more than a decade ago by Adbusters Magazine, a Vancouver-based anti-consumerism group. The organization wants shoppers to step back and make a small choice not to shop in protest against rampant consumerism. BND is held annually on the Friday after the U.S. Thanksgiving.

"It's a celebration of not giving in to the consumer cultures," said Jason McLean, a member of Montreal's Optative Theatrical Laboratories (OTL), a community-based, non-hierarchical dramatic arts collective known for its long running performance-protest Car Stories.

"Buy Nothing Day gives me a

chance to fully live what I preach on a personal level. It's a great feeling to know that, for at least one day, I'm part of the solution," McLean said.

People from around the world were encouraged to cut up their credit cards, build banners and posters, arrange free concerts, create shopping free zones with carpets and chairs, and dress up as pigs and shopping sheep, as a way to protest and bring awareness to rapidly growing consumption and consumer culture.

But the common call was for everyone to refrain from making purchases for 24 hours.

According to organizers, since BND uses clever techniques to attract attention, it exposes the environmental and ethical consequences of consumerism.

"Only 20 per cent of the world population is consuming more than 80 per cent of the earth's natural resources, causing a disproportionate level of environmental damage and unfair distribution of wealth."

Montreal's OTL has been celebrating BND since 2002. Last year's performance of death by Latte inside two Starbucks sent a clear message to Concordia students that Starbucks was selling on campus. This year the group brought their special brand of theatre to one of Montreal's American Apparel stores.

"Our performances are designed to make people think about how and why they are participating in consumer culture," McLean said, adding that BND was a perfect fit for his group.

McLean hopes that consumers will question their own complicity



Vancouver's Adbusters Magazine started Buy Nothing Day over a decade ago. Now, over 65 countries participate in the international day of anti-consumerism.

in something that he said is ultimately destructive to all.

"When you perform a work critical of consumer culture to people who are actively participating in it, then you bring about thought and discussion when it is most relevant. That's how artists can help to bring about change."

Café Blue Monday, a vegan café located in Verdun, participated in BND by not selling any of their products. Instead, to promote BND the social conscious café offered free food and drinks backed by donations from Concordia's People's Potato and bread from Première Moisson.

"Sure it is good publicity for the Café," said Pierre Beaudoin, one

of the co-owners. "But as an ethical and socially aware business we just had to do something. If people can come here and have a healthy meal rather than going to McDonalds we have done what we set out to do."

The turn out at the Café Blue Monday was a little less than expected but overall the owners felt that the event made people think a little more about their consumer habits.

"The people that came in that day were really supportive of what we were doing," Beaudoin said. "The people who came for the first time thought that it [BND] was a good idea and encouraged us to continue."

Wendy French, 20, said she participated in the event to show people the "link between consumption and injustice," such as the war in Iraq and its relationship to oil consumption, but she finds that buying nothing is a bit silly. "The point of buy nothing day is not to reduce consumption, but to take a day to try to understand the impact of consumerism on your life."

Thirteen years after the original "No Shop Day," the word has spread. BND is now an international event celebrated in over 65 countries meant to get us out of a consumer feeding frenzy mindset and to think about what we are buying.